HM

THE HARD MUSIC MAGAZINE

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Seventh Star
Dizmas
Good Charlotte
The Almost [Poster]
These 5 Down
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PROJECT 86

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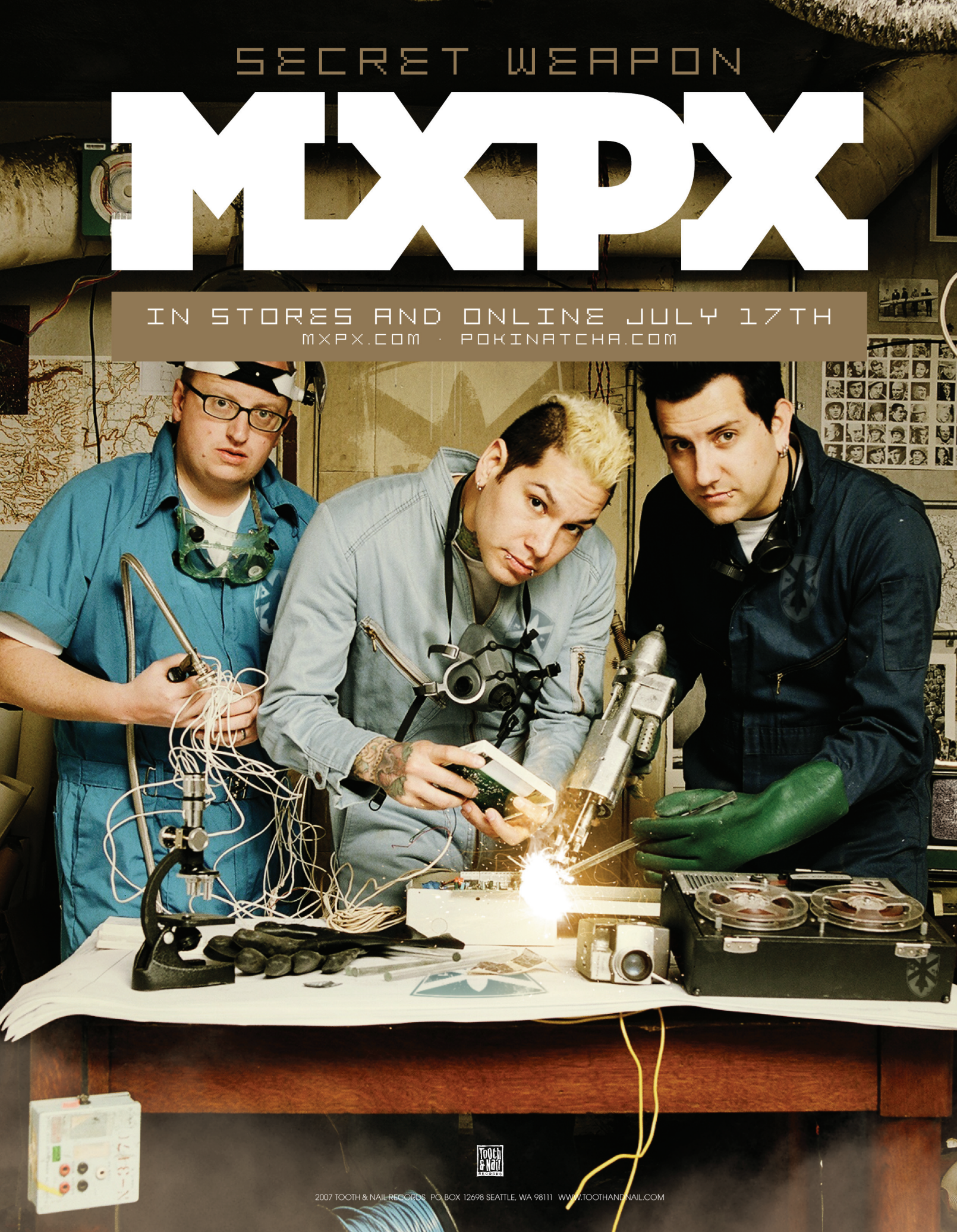
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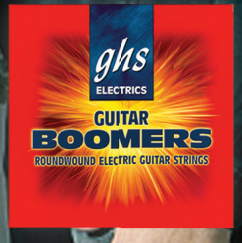

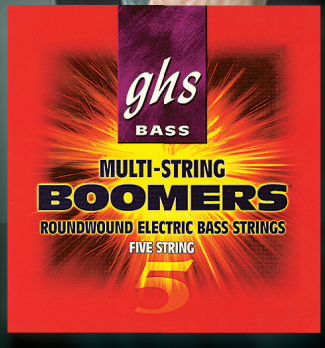

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From the editor

Doug Van Pelt

THE FUTURE OF HM MAGAZINE IS HERE...

It's been exciting and challenging to run HM Magazine lately. The exciting part is I finally found a company and a paradigm that I'm comfortable with in launching our first complete online edition. Each issue of HM Magazine will now be in two distinct formats: digital and print. I believe that the need for print magazines will never go away on planet earth. There will always be a need for something to read in the, um, uh, the rest room ... as well as the bus stop, doctor's office, etc. The only down side to this issue of the magazine is that we didn't sell enough ads to make it worth our while to print the normally thick Summer Festival issue. That's just the way it is – more ads mean more pages of rock. They pay the large print bills. What can I say? Our digital edition is an exciting new feature that comes along at just the right time – now! Since this issue is only 64 pages (and we had to agonizingly cut 17 features), our new online edition becomes more than just a digital reflection of the print version. It's now a 96-page edition with exclusive content! Normally the cut pieces would never be seen or they would become "online exclusives," but this digital edition gives you a chance to see it in its original context.

All current subscribers to HM Magazine (print version) will get a special password delivered to you in order to unlock this digital edition as well as the corresponding editions for the remainder of your subscription.

For the hardcore collector, we're working with a print-on-demand place that will make single copies of a special exclusive 96-page print version available. Look for it in the HM store at hmmag.com soon.

Have a blessed and safe summer!

SPINNING AT HM NOW

MIKE FARRIS	*Salvation In Lights*	Absolutely brilliant, passionate, soulful album.
DEREK WEBB	*The Ringing Bell*	Not *Mockingbird.* Takes some gettin' used to.
DAVE BARNES	*Chasing Mississippi*	Darn good Mayer/Matthews-like rock.
BILLY LAMONT	*Hedge Of Thorns*	Rough cuts of poetry in motion.
MARIA MCKEE	*Late December*	An acquired taste ... and I sure acquired it!
HOPESFALL	*Magnetic North*	They call it: "...a metaphor for personal searches."
INHABITED	*Love*	Pop/CCM Radio fare with good vocals...

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Letters to the Edit

FLIP THE HARSH WORDS

Underoath as "media darlings?" Oh sure. Except, you know, for all the too-cool-for-school non-Christian super-arty rags that bash them every chance they get for "being Jesus rockers." I'm not saying Underoath don't get love, but they're hardly media darlings outside of the Christian hard music camp. The KIDS love Underoath, though, even if the press may or may not. Heh... Skillet "putting out quality for ten years?" That stopped three years ago. I cannot fathom the sheer critical acclaim and love the latest Skillet record is getting. I understand the sales; though *Comatose* is nothing but a regurgitation of top-40 rock radio in the past three years. I hate having to listen to Kelly Clarkson, Avril Lavigne, Linkin Park, Evanescence, Sum 41, et al on the radio at work as it is. I am disgusted that my loyalty to Skillet resulted in a waste of twenty dollars. And don't get me started on the lyrics. Apparently 30+ John Cooper has been reading 17-year old goth kids' diaries. I recognize this sounds bitter, but I'm pretty frustrated that Skillet's best-selling record ever is a corporate piece of garbage. I should probably get over it, but it's frustrating to be a fan for so long and be fed *Comatose*. Neon Horse! I'm so sure it's Mark Salomon and J. Martin, but the music has me sold, regardless of band members' identities. Rock & Roll Demon Hunter? Awesome. Love the new digital edition, and that you're not sacrificing the awesomeness of print to do it. Nothing beats getting HM in my mailbox. Will you guys be doing a feature on Project 86's new record? I'm looking forward to it greatly, especially after the two songs they posted to Purevolume. HM continues to rock. Best.
–Ryan Ro, via internet

Ed – So many questions! So much bitterness! I think you've seen the answer to your Project 86 query already, though. Thanks for the encouragement on the new digital edition. Cheers!

WHO IS A BOLD CHRISTIAN?

What's up with Evanescence? Are they Christian or are they not? I have taken notice that HM has taken to highlighting their name as you normally would do for Christian bands, but this here is a band that spoke out saying they were not Christian – or so I was told, at any rate. Have they changed their minds about that or what? I think that would make an interesting read if you guys did an article on them and asked them about their position on being a Christian or a non-Christian band being mistaken for a Christian band. I haven't been able to make sense of it since I noticed you guys have been highlighting their name and would love to know. I'm a fan of their music regardless, but I wouldn't mind knowing their position on this topic. Thanks.
–Joshua Clark, via internet

Ed – Ha! You are like the first person to ever notice that we bold the names of "artists of interest to Christians" in HM. Notice that phrase? That is how we'd classify Evanescence. John LeCompt and Rocky Gray are some really cool believers that just left EV (! ...and were replaced with members of Dark New Day). Amy Lee and (especially) the departed Ben Moody) went out of their way in mag interviews to make sure people didn't call them a "Christian band." Still, even with all of that, they are "of interest" to many Christians. Thus, their cautious (at least in the editor's mind) inclusion in HM Magazine.

TOO HARD

I just received the May/June issue of HM. I must say that you guys always do an amazing job! My real complaints with this issue were: 1) No Andrew Schwab contributions! (I am sure he was working on the new P86 album); and 2) I felt that Matt Conner was way too hard on Seventh Day Slumber. I really feel that they have improved with every album and their latest even features some pretty sweet solo work. Since when is something completely unoriginal simply because it reflects a genre that is no longer trendy? While SDS might not exactly be Matt's cup of tea, he could at least acknowledge the fact that they are much more talented than Kutless, one of the hightest-selling Christian bands in the market!
–Dave Kratz, via internet

Ed – 1) We missed Andrew's great writing, too. 2) Amen. I disagreed with that SDS review, too; and was glad to have an Editor's rating system to add somewhat of a "balancing" and/or dissenting voice. One last question: Can I give the members of Kutless your address in Philly?

HM

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SCRIPTURE "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (1 Peter 2:24-25)

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HARDNEWS
Quick & concise

LEELAND
ROCKS JAPAN

Leeland's debut album, *Sound of Melodies*, hit stores across Japan last month, and the current single on Japan Radio jumped from No. 17 to No. 6. During their recent promo trip, they interviewed with MTV Japan, *In Rock Magazine* and played a sold-out concert at Harajuku Astro Hall in Tokyo. "We are very excited about what is happening with our music in Japan, and can't wait to get back over there," shares frontman, Leeland Mooring. "People told us after the concert how they loved our 'melodies' and that there was a sort of 'healing' in the music. The experience of having to communicate with our new friends via translators was a special thing. It's an awesome reminder of how big this world truly is; that there's more to it than the street we live on, and the circle of people that we interact with everyday. After our experience in Japan, the heart we as a band have for our generation is only bigger."

STILL REMAINS
UNLEASHES THE SERPENT

Still Remains has been hard at work for the last 10 months writing and preparing for their second studio album, titled *The Serpent*. The band entered an LA studio with acclaimed producer, Steve Evetts (Story of the Year, He Is Legend, Saves the Day), to begin the recording process. "It's been a long wait for us," comments frontman, TJ Miller. "It's such a refreshing feeling to finally be in the studio again, working on all the material we have been writing for the past year. Expect the unexpected, as these songs are faster, darker, heavier and more melodic; truly the most honest thing we have ever written as a band." The album is slated for a July release, but the band plans on touring on it beforehand and afterwards "until our bodies quit functioning." Look for them on *Warped Tour* in August.

Kevin Max returns with exploratory project

The new Kevin Max album, *The Blood*, will be distributed by Infinity Music in the fall. This album shows Kmax doing a "musical exploration of Gospel. "*The Blood* is not a classic hymns cover project or a white / homogenized version of black gospel or soul music," explains Max. "It's a sensitive and stylized adaptation of the music that was at the root of rock and roll, blues and popular culture. *The Blood* is about the story of redemption and grace, found only in the salvation story of Jesus Christ. We intend to produce with kid gloves, but also with our hearts on overdrive and our heads in check. There is an extreme sense of respect and sensitivity to the art as we approach the choosing and arrangement of these songs. It has taken me almost 2 decades to come full circle and realize how much Gospel music has inspired me and influenced my decisions in music. Long before there was rock and roll, the blues or country, there was Gospel. I look forward to digging deep into a historical art form that deserves as much attention as any musical genre in existence."

News bullets

As I Lay Dying's **Tim Lambesis** is co-producing the new Sworn Enemy album along with Joey Z (Life Of Agony). Adding to the all-star cast in support of this fantastic release, AILD's **Jordan Mancino** recorded all of the drum tracks for the full-length. As a fan and friend of the band, Jordan was excited to be a part of this project as Sworn Enemy is currently sans drummer. Jordan recorded his tracks where he records for As I Lay Dying at Big Fish Studios in San Diego.

Project 86's sixth album, *Rival Factions*, was produced by Ulrich Wild (Bleeding Through, Deftones) and will be mastered at Los Angeles' The Bomb Shelter (home of *The Henry Rollins Show*). The band plans to heavily tour to promote the album. "The goal was to make bored housewives hum our jams while they are baking cookies," **Andrew Schwab** jokes.

Cue The Doves (**Jon Berndtson**, ex-The Beautiful Mistake) are currently recording their sophomore LP, *Stabilizing Vitals*, in Minneapolis, MN. The album will consist of 10 to 12 songs co-produced/mixed by Berndtson and engineer James Singer, with mastering done by Brian Johnson (Coldplay, The Wallflowers, Semisonic). Chris Ruff of Kaddisfly is also scheduled to provide guest vocals and instrumentation on the record. "This is the heaviest and most creative music we've made to date as a band," Berndtson said of the album. Once it's finished, the five-piece plans to independently release the record this summer.

The new **MxPx** album, *Secret Weapon*, is set for release on Tooth & Nail on July 17. They will support the album by headlining the *Tooth & Nail tour*. The first single is the title track and album opener, which features a guitar solo from Bad Religion's Brian Baker and also finds MxPx wielding its infamous, optimistic tack. "We've always been a band that's tried to focus on the positive side of life," acknowledges **Mike Herrera**. "But we try to do it in a way that's real to people and not cheesy. We kind of embrace the dismal and the uplifting at the same time. And 'Secret Weapon,' the song and the album, sums up where MXPX is right now."

MAHTEO

MAHTEO has been gigging around the Dallas, TX area for a good couple of years now, garnering the attention of manager Eric Shirey. Brothers Rene and Raul Espinosa were both in a band called Swivel together back in the 90s, and have been part of MAHTEO with Mike Cardenas, Nathan Monteleone and Rafa Badillo for the past three or four years.

What does the name MAHTEO mean? I know that's a cliché question and all, but...
Rene Espinosa: Well, we went through many names and nothing really stuck or felt right, so we thought about it and came to the conclusion that we needed something short, memorable, easy to remember, and meaningful. I don't know how, but the name San Mateo (Saint Matthew) jumped into my head, and I thought it sounded great. We kept MAHTEO (added the "H"). We also like the whole reference to Saint Matthew, you know it's not just a name that looks cool on paper, but actually has meaning.

If you could write the perfect song, how would you keep from over-producing it or over-thinking it and thus possibly ruining it?
We've done that before with our songwriting. We found that the more simple the song is the better it gets, the more we enjoy playing it, and the more people respond positively to it. Our single "Lucky" is a great example of this, because it literally has only two riffs in it and every time we played it live we got tons of compliments. It's funny to us, cause that's the song that we spent the least amount of time on.

If you had one day left on earth and had a big audience, what would you want to say to those listening?
Well, I remember going to lots of underground shows and the crowd would be beating each other up and call it "moshing," while the band was preaching their anger at the world; it just started to get boring. To contrast this, I remember going to Latin rock shows and it was just such a different vibe; nobody was fighting, people were actually dancing and singing along, everybody was just enjoying the night. It was like they were celebrating life; they were just happy to be there. So, what I would say to people is this: "Celebrate life, enjoy the music, enjoy being in the company of a beautiful girl – just love life and quit wasting your time being angry."

Tell us about your new music. What are your favorite songs on it at the moment? Why?
Well MAHTEO's music is upbeat and a little aggressive, with cool keyboard riffs. We kinda got the new wave thing going on, hence the new album title: *The Nu-Wave Republic*. We think it's great that we get to pay homage to the bands that influenced us growing up. It reminds me of why we fell in love with music in the first place; it's something we hope to never lose sight of. It's our way of "returning the favor." As far as favorite songs, that would have to be: "Lucky" and "Montreal." They're fun to play and people really love them, and they set the standard of the way our sound is heading. I think it's really interesting that these songs are catchy, but the lyrical content is something quite serious. "Montreal" is about growing up on Montreal Ave, which was a gang infested street, and "Lucky" is about the pro-life perspective. So it's great to see people sing along to those songs.

Define your band in three words.
"To-the-point."

Dizmas will be out touring to promote its new album, *Tension*, with **This Beautiful Republic** and **Ever Stays Red**.

The Knockout Kings will be featured on the new installment of *The Emo Diaries, Volume 11 – Bonfire of Trust*, on Deep Elm Records. Their song, "Question Authority," was recorded specifically for this and it will only be available on the comp. They will also be on the *Fight Back! Volume 1* album, along with **widows&orphans**, **MAHTEO**, **The Canvas Waiting**, **The Devil Wears Prada**, **Sherwood**, and others on Champion Recordings, which is run by by none other than Ryan Conley (drummer for Oh, Sleeper / ex-Terminal).

The new album from **The Rocket Summer**, *Do You Feel*, releases July 17th. A 4-song EP will precede it on iTunes, with the new single, "So Much Love," an exclusive acoustic track and two other cuts from the album. Look for the wonder kid on *Warped Tour* this summer.

Day of Fire is touring with multi-platinum American Idol, **Chris Daughtry**.

Jars Of Clay recently won two Dove Awards, in the Rock/Contemporary Album category for its *Good Monsters* project, and the other in the Short Form Music Video of the Year category for "Work." **Demon Hunter** frontman **Ryan Clark** also won a Dove Award in the category Recorded Music Packaging of the Year for his graphic design work with his company Invisible Creature on the **Jeremy Camp** album, *Beyond Measure*.

Aletheian played the prestigious New England Metal and Hardcore Fest. The band recently signed with IronClad Recordings, which is a sub-label of Metal Blade, based out of the Boston, MA area, owned and operated in part by Trevor of Unearth.

Red is continuing its intense touring schedule, currently out on the road with Three Days Grace, Breaking Benjamin and Puddle of Mudd.

Norma Jean is out on the road with **Thrice** this summer.

HARDNEWS
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Inked In Blood

BY KELLY BENSON

"I would say Inked In Blood is the answer to anyone who is looking for something different. Something that's both hard, but also extremely melodic; with lyrics that anyone can really relate to and keep in their hearts forever. I think we have something for everyone," commented guitarist/vocalist Kelly James during a break from recording their follow-up album to *Lay Waste The Poets*. "We are actually in the studio this very second filling out this interview. All of the music is recorded, and when I'm finished with this interview, we are going in to record the vocals."

Kelly, former "merch guy" for the band, is the newest member and joins on the heels of several line-up changes. "In my opinion, being someone who wasn't in the band when they made the previous albums, but knowing the guys, I think that the evolution of IIB is an obvious and natural one. It's always been about setting themselves apart from other bands, playing whatever they want, not worrying about what anyone else thinks, and never recreating something they've already done. Always moving forward. I think it's obviously heard between *Awakening Vesuvius* and *Poets*, and will once again be heard from *Poets* to our new album. Progression is key."

As IIB progresses they are definitely setting themselves apart if not only for their geographical location, Portland, Oregon where … well, there's just not many bands like them (and you can't pump your own gas, but that's a story for another day). But if anything can awaken the Pacific Northwest from an overcast slumber, it would be their live show, which often features signature moves including the "Tri-force," which creates a pyramid with Matt (guitar) and Kelly as the base and Joey (vocals) as the capstone. Kelly explained, "A few 80s hair metal bands used to do that, and almost all of us grew up on that kind of stuff, and we wanted to give people something awesome to see, so we decided to start doing it. We just brought it back, though; IIB hasn't done it for a while. But now it's back in full effect!"

Just as Matt and Kelly set the foundation for the Tri-force, one quote could set the foundation for the purpose and heart behind IIB, "We strive to be poets, the voice of a brand new age."

"That quote is a line from our song 'These Sonnets of Our Lives' from our last record." explains Joey. "I would say that song, and that line in particular, is a great representation of what we want to do with our music as artists. We believe there needs to be more people who are quick to listen to each other, rather than talk over each other to serve their own aims. I use the character of the 'Poet' to represent people who can use art and creativity to build connections to others throughout our culture; as opposed to marginalizing other people because of our differences."

News bullets

The Showdown is playing this year's Ozzfest, which happens to be a free show this year. You have to go to ozzfest.com to get info on the free tickets.

Krystal Meyers was recently voted among the top three best dressers by Japan's biggest & most influential international music mag, *In Rock Magazine*, along with Gwen Stefani and Avril Lavigne. She was additionally named a Vans shoe model for all ABC Marts in Japan and could be seen on multiple PRS (Paul Reid Smith) Guitars billboards in Japan.

Victory Records is releasing some of its most popular titles on limited edition, colored vinyl. Beginning May 1, five titles will be made available to the public, including hardcore heroes **Comeback Kid**'s latest release, *Broadcasting*.

Sanctus Real is touring the Southeast and Midwest with **Needtobreathe** and **This Beautiful Republic**.

Lovedrug has snagged the sole support slot on the Sparta / Straylight Run national tour.

In support of their self-titled release, **Rush Of Fools** will join **By The Tree** and **The Turning** on the *World On Fire* tour.

Evanescence and **Flyleaf** are touring with Korn on *The Family Values Tour*.

Family Force 5 will be playing on the *Vans Warped Tour.*,

"I can just say the only significance of the band name (**Dance Gavin Dance**) is that it's contradictory to band names like 'Summer hearts is bleeding on a Monday of a godless winter's death,' or something like that," explains vocalist **Jon Mess**. Their full-length debut, *Downtown Battle Mountain*, comes out on Rise Records. Armed with a two vocalist approach, Jon delivers the screams while **Jonny Craig** is the singer. This Sacramento, CA outfit will be on the road this summer on the *Rise Tour* with **Drop Dead Gorgeous**, **The Devil Wears Prada** and **At The Throne Of Judgment**.

The Dear & Departed

BY BRADLEY SPITZER

If The Dear & Departed have it their way, you'll soon be enjoying their new wave, rock sound on their debut release, *Something Quite Peculiar*. That is, if you aren't already a fan. The quintet has been winning over audiences across America and the world, all while sharing the stage with comrades AFI and Avenged Sevenfold.

The core members of the group – Dan Under (vocals), Joel Bourne (drums) and Simon O'Gorman (guitar) – moved to America together from Australia and New Zealand and now call Orange County their home. Their journey, like most young bands, has had its share of rough patches and valuable life lessons. "It's always a nightmare dealing with the politics of the industry, especially since it has changed so much and there seems to be less money for people to grab at. It's funny how that changes things. I think all you can do is live and learn and remember who the good people are."

After some tough times, the band found themselves courted by Los Angeles based record company Science and then signed to the label. They entered the studio with producer Chris Vrenna, well known for his production work with U2 and Smashing Pumpkins and as a drummer/programmer for Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson and Gnarls Barkley. "I think the hardest part of recording is finding someone that is on your page with what you're doing. We are so grateful we met Chris, an amazing musician who is now a great friend."

With a record to push and momentum on their side, this summer the band will add the *Vans Warped Tour* to their growing resume of shows and festivals. Though they have previously toured alongside AFI, they'll have the opportunity to expose their music and friendship to youth across the nation.

But success for The Dear & Departed is, ultimately, going to come on their own terms. When asked what separates the band from the sea of other bands out there today, it's clear they are focused. "I think the fact that we're being ourselves, playing honest music about life and times. I think kids forget that music is merely a soundtrack to the experience you've had and what you feel… All the great bands started playing because they had to – it was a result of the ever-changing world and what they faced as a result of that. It was the only thing to do to release what they were feeling and that's what is evident in older music that I feel is lacking today. We just identify more with that era."

Flatfoot 56 live shows are improvised, contingent on the band making swift transitions between guitar, mandolin, bagpipes and whatever other eclectic instruments they bring to the party. "We've got it down to a science; we don't really make set lists. We kind of go with hand signals, because we like to play certain songs to get certain crowds involved. Because of that, Josh has become really quick at flipping instruments. He'll have a guy stand on the side for bigger shows to throw him the instrument he needs. It helps to tailor our set to each crowd as opposed to playing the same songs every night."

Dallas-based punk rock band **Greyskull** is being featured across Asia as part of Nokia N series' *You Make It Reel* campaign to introduce the new Nokia N93i video phone. The band is the "face" of the phone marketing campaign and their image (and music) is plastered on television, print, online and mobile phone ads in Australia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Five songs off their new CD, *Pretty in Ink*, are featured in the campaign contest, as well as the television spots. "This is a great way to get people all over the world to hear and see what we're about," said **Chris Smyers**, vocalist and bass player for the band.

The Birth is a new electronic band featuring **Eric Flores** and **Scott Dunbar** from **widows&orphans**. Eric is the notoriously bearded wonder of a drummer for w&o and Scott provides the high and very recognizable signature background vocals and frantic guitar work. They've recently recorded with Corey Kilduf, whom many know from his long resume of musical endeavors, which include being the singer for Ferret Music's band The Rise.

New Orleans native **Jake Smith** just signed with Rocketown Records. His debut CD, *Real*, offers a "fusion of soulful, groove-based pop that blends seamlessly together to create a sound reflective of the richness and eclecticism of New Orleans." His influences range from Ray Charles to John Mayer and Ray LaMontagne.

HARDNEWS
Page sixteen

Enough Already!

BY JAMIE LEE RAKE

One of my greatest journalistic joys is turning you on to indescribable music, however old.

Meet **THE TREES COMMUNITY**, a nomadic '70s denomination-unto-themselves responsible for *The Christ Tree* (Hand/Eye), a diversely lovely quadruple-CD package. Here the octet's only two albums come alongside a two-disc concert. Eighty acoustic instruments from the world over ... about as many liturgical traditions ... vocals incorporating operatic recitative, chant, etc ... believers making music original as anything the world can offer. Can't find the box set? Pester the label for another pressing or get the single-CD reissue. But not the bootleg! [SomeDarkHoller.com]

DAVID A. MANN knows comedy from the Tyler Perry plays he's anchored with his soul gospel diva wife, Tamela. With his yuk-chops and gravelly tenor, Mann helms *Mr. Brown's Good Ol' Time Church*. Mann's Mr. Brown character misses Sunday service and compensates by singing a slew of hymns and spirituals to himself with organ-heavy, retro arrangements. Comedically, between telephone skits. Huh?! Sure 'nuff goofy, but sincere and evangelistic. Catch the crunk remix! [DavidAMann.com]

Is that Dino guy still plinking his keyboard in Branson? Either way, **TERRY MACALMON** fills the void of intermittently lounge-y, mighty orchestrally fortified pianism on *Holy!* (MacAlmon Music). Strangely, MacAlmon includes lyrics with this instrumental album of music reverent enough for Scripture reading, romantic enough for a dinner date. If the theory goes that metal's really just classical music with shredding guitars, MacAlmon's making what should soon be power ballads. And/or tracks for the next Larnelle Harris album. A guilty pleasure? [TerryMacAlmon.com]

Yay for **NICOLE C. MULLEN** having enough traction in cCm to be relatively experimental as she is on *Sharecropper's Seed Vol. 1* (Word/Warner Brothers/Curb). "Experimental"in this case means occasions of authentic Afro-pop percussive complexity, bare bones alt soul funkiness and classical/rock string thangs that recall ELO meeting a string quartet. The stuff that even contempo' Xian radio will play sounds better than much of her Fish FM/K-Love competition. Here's looking forward to *Vol. 2*.

Send music. Much and varied. To: P.O. Box 29, Waupuin, WI 53963-0029 U.S.A.

News bullets

During each stop on their current North American tour, **Switchfoot** is selling "bootleg" copies of live songs from the concert that night. Copies of each city's version will only be available for sale at the concert in the city it was recorded in. A new website, switchfootbootlegs.com, has been created to share the "bootleg" copies with fans in other cities. This is better than a Grateful Dead club!

Seventh Day Slumber frontman **Joseph Rojas** has been appointed as the CEO and President of ZJAM's Revolution Generation.

The Generation Unleashed is a 26-member worship band and choir of approximately 100 teenagers and young adults who are all members of Generation Church, the youth ministry of City Bible Church and the fuel behind the Annual Generation Unleashed conferences.

Dustin Kensrue has pledged 5% of his proceeds from his solo album, *Please Come Home*, to the non-profit org To Write Love on Her Arms. "I try to be an artist who aspires to find hope even in dark places: If I'm down, I don't want to bring people down to that place with me. I'm looking for a way out," says Kensrue.

The HM Magazine Stage at the Cornerstone Festival lineup is: 6/27: **widows&orphans**; **The Showdown**; **Showbread**; **Becoming The Archetype**; 6/28: **Page France**; **Wiitala Brothers**; **Gasoline Heart**; **Starflyer 59**; 6/29: **Whitecross**; **Bride**; **X-Sinner**; **Bloodgood**; 6/30: **Man Alive**; **Lost Ocean**; **Hundred Year Storm**; **Sleeping At Last**.

The Chariot are touring with Misery Signals, **I Am Ghost**, The Human Abstract, and I Hate Sally.

Maylene... filmed a video for "Dry the River" at Sanna Ranch in Agua Dulce, CA. "It turned out amazing," says Dallas.

Pillar is working hard on their next album. They're hoping to hit the studio in July.

Artists with cool new DVDs include: **The Lost Dogs** and **No Longer Music**.

Oceans Above

BY MATT CONNER

"Worship music for people who don't like worship music?" Seems a bit strange. After all, rock groups don't try to make rock music for people who don't like it. And in any other category or genre, you simply would find the musical style you do like, whether it be country or R&B. However, producer Chad Howat insists this was the goal and end result for *Oceans Above*. Put simply, *Oceans Above* is an attempt by Sparrow Records to chart new territory in the worship genre, avoiding the stereotypical sounds in favor of what Howat calls "electro-pop." And if anyone is well suited for the reins, it is Howat, whose primary musical outlet is the indie experimental-rock group Paper Route.

"The initial idea behind *Oceans Above* was to make worship music for people who don't normally enjoy listening to worship music," says Howat. "I must admit that lately I had fallen into that category, so when the opportunity came to make this album, I was definitely up for the challenge." The concept made sense to Howat. "As an artist myself, it was difficult to turn off my brain and listen to worship music which stylistically was something I'd never normally listen to," he explains. "I know the point of worship is not about me, but I also know that I'd be more inclined to listen to a worship record that was more along the lines of the music I enjoy. I figured other people might have similar tendencies as me, so I thought it was an album worth making."

Utilizing many of the same textures and ambient tendencies that Paper Route employs, Howat went to work surrounding himself with like-minded individuals to create unique spins on familiar tracks, like "O Praise Him," "God of Wonders" and "Blessed Be Your Name."

"The idea was to make an electro-pop kind of record, so that meant I usually started by creating a beat for the song," says Howat. "After that I'd try to find some sort of sonic textures to color the song. I'd make samples, twist knobs on keyboards, sing, make sounds with my mouth, whatever I felt like doing, basically. Overall I felt that the more organic sounds I could use, the more unique the record would turn out." Thus far, the feedback seems to find Howat on the right track.

U2's **The Edge** was given an honorary Doctor of Music degree from the Berklee College of Music. In his commencement speech, he advised the students: "The thing I want to say is collaborate. Collaborating with talented people is not easy, but it's the way to really shine – you shine brighter if you are working with really great people. The important thing in the end is not that you are proved right every time, the important thing is that the music is the best that it can be. I want to wish you all that you would find your own voice. But if you are so disposed that you would find collaborators to work with, that you would shine as you could never shine on your own."

Open Grave Records is currently streaming the entire new album from **Kekal**, *The Habit of Fire*.

Fireflight got a warm reception at Germany's Christmas Rock Night last year and has since been invited back to four other European festivals this spring.

Kutless is throwing an "audition" contest with PRS Guitars. Six aspiring guitarists will get to play with them at one of six summer music festivals, with the grand prize winner receiving an autographed custom PRS Guitar.

Virgin Black is touring the US this summer with Finland's To/Die/For.

The latest touring members of The Smashing Pumpkins are **Jeff Schroeder** (guitar), formally Lassie Foundation and The Violet Burning, as well as, **Ginger Reyes** (bass), who you may recognize from Halo Friendlies, supported by keyboardist Lisa Harriton.

As I Lay Dying has finished up its latest album, *An Ocean Between Us*, which was mixed by Colin Richardson and produced by Adam Dutkiewicz (Killswitch Engage). The band is supporting this immediately with several shows in Europe and some heavy touring in the US (including *Warped Tour* dates). Don't be surprised to see the band on the next cover of HM Magazine.

In an industry-wide sales slump, **Creed**'s *Greatest Hits* is selling 4-5K units/week.

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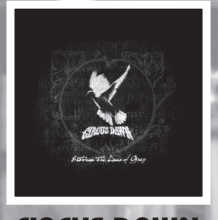

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LIVE REPORT

"Gospel Music Week" (GMA)

April 22-25

BY DOUG VAN PELT

NASHVILLE, TN – A collection of Southern Gospel ladies and gents decided to make this time of year a gathering time for people singing in quartets and other ensembles to come together, mingle, fellowship, feast, and acknowledge one another's work with an annual award ceremony called "The Dove Awards." Sometime in the 80's a younger generation took this event, called it their own and GMA became a quasi-hip half-week of showcases and "schmoozing" that lives on to this day.

Silhouette A.D. is an all-girl band that can hang with any, churning out a black/death metal sound that's long on heaviness and dual shrill/growling vocals. They rocked the small room with a legitimate metal power, teeth and passion. The last two songs of their set included a haunting, epic and beautifully powerful Norwegian-like keyboard vibe; and a cool scream-along called "Set This Heart On Fire." **ilia**, another all-girl band played a heavy, solid and full-sounding brand of rock not long after.

Bloodgood proved that they are a world-class metal band, with bright-sounding guitars cutting through the air and a tight rhythm section of **Michael Bloodgood** and drummer Mark Welling. **Les Carlsen**'s vocals sounded really good, and he still shows off that operatic vibrato. The band really sounded good, like they had life and energy in their veins. Having two guitarists – in **Paul Jackson** and **Oz Fox**, made the sound never drop out. The energetic leads and fills were thrilling to hear, as they were played with feeling and precise skill. They played again the following night, which included a cameo by founding guitarist **David Zaffiro**.

Darrell Mansfield's set was good, beginning with "All Along The Watchtower" and ending with an eloquent message and "People Get Ready."

Whitecross played a fiery set in pretty near peak form. It was fun seeing indie rockers like Todd Evans (The Golden Sounds, Atticus Fault) in the crowd, singing along and getting into the metal.

Project 86 performed with their trademark heaviness, throwing in a few new songs, like "Evil (A Chorus Of Resistance)." Andrew stage dove and sang the last song atop outstretched hands.

Demon Hunter strode on stage with priest collars to their *Triptych* intro, with Ryan Clark screaming the line from *300*: "Tonight we dine in hell!" They ripped through "Heart Strings Come Undone," "1,000 Apologies" and "Undying."

Ruth performed on a giant ballroom stage, playing a fairly mellow rock set with cool, smooth tunes.

Red pelted their audience with intensity at the Mercy Lounge. Their mix of gothic and pop sensibilities with metal power sound pretty darn solid. They ended with "Breathe" and did a good job of wresting plenty of energy out of the audience and giving it back.

Kids In The Way have toughened up their sound (and look), adding more Cult / fist-pumping biker rock muscle and less snotty punk. Two new songs: "My Little Nightmare" and "Sugar" showed their new direction even more. The latter had churning power riffs that fit nicely within the context of a melodic rocker.

Pillar vocalist **Rob Beckley** acted like a conductor as the band stopped on a dime to end "Bring Me Down." The song "Awake" sounded good, and Rob closed his eyes as he leaned over the crowd, belting out the lyrics like he meant each and every one of them. He shared his heart prior to the last song and even dedicated "Fireproof" to their "good friend" Melba Jackson. That was a hoot.

Clockwise from top: Bloodgood coming back in a guitar blaze of glory; Silhouette A.D.; Darrell Mansfield; Ruth; and Pillar's Rob Beckley [Photos by Doug Van Pelt]
For more, go to the "Editor's Blog" at hmmag.com

Heaven's Metal

Metal tracks

1

2

3

• Two big comebacks loom big on the immediate horizon – **Bloodgood**[1] and **Deliverance**. Bloodgood, as chronicled on the previous page, made a double impressive splash with two shows at Nashville's Rocketown, showing that they've still got what it takes to get noticed and respected – on the merits of their metallic music alone. **Oz Fox** and **Paul Jackson** sound like a perfect fit together, sharing leads that Jackson used to handle by himself. Oz definitely adds his own personality to each lead he plays, even segueing from "S.O.S" into "To Hell With The Devil" for a few measures (and a chorus) or throwing in a few licks from "Purple Haze" during the song "Seven" on the first night. The second night, of course, included the onstage cameo by **David Zaffiro**. While Zippy's playing wasn't as monstrous as the "Guitar Burn" he used to do live, the grin on his face at being on stage with his old bandmates[2] was a mile wide. "It's a brand new band," states vocalist **Les Carlsen**. "New attitude. This is not a 'reunion tour.' We did what we did, but now we're a new band. We're older, wiser, but we're talented and we're ready to rock with new stuff." (The new demo's I heard sound really good - mixing later Bloodgood hard rock melodic sensibilities with that metallic bite that's bold and unashamed in this musical age...) **Michael Bloodgood** affirms, "Oz being in the band gives us a legitimacy that we're a new band. We have our catalog and I love what we did, but I'm really looking forward to the new stuff and going to new places that we couldn't and didn't before. Different ideas that we didn't have before – we're just kind of going along for the ride. The great thing is we don't have anything to prove. We're just gonna walk as the Lord tells us to walk. We're not going to bowl people over, but we're not going to apologize for what we do." Oz chimes in with excitement, too: "It's just amazing to see the creative talents that we have here and the possibilities are endless. For a heavy metal band, being what Bloodgood is, I really feel like this is a way to bring back a new surge of interest in this kind of music – and not be like the old days – be something fresh and attractive.

• Mijaces Records has released the new debut solo CD by **Mike Botello** (from the late 80s progressive metal band **Awake**), *A Timeless State*. [mjcrecords.com]

• **Deliverance**[3] is simultaneously releasing four albums on Retroactive Records: *Greetings Of Death*; *The First Four Years; Assimilation* (a double disc *Expanded Edition*); and the brand new *As Above – So Below.*

• Former **Barren Cross** vocalist, **Mike Lee**, is back in the US (as **Michael Drive**), doing shows after several years residing in France.

Album reviews

LENGSEL – *The Kiss – The Hope*

Despite the lackluster response from the metal community over the released single off this record, I found some *Solace* in it. The former extreme metal band continued their experimentation on *The Kiss – The Hope*. They blend European goth from the 80's with old school punk, with tinges of their black metal past. Added into the diversity of the album are hints of ambient and drone. Although this was not expected, fans of quirky music with extreme edges should give it a listen. I have to admit that they should have changed the name of their band (a sentiment shared by many, we are sure), yet some could see this album as a progression. It takes you through a wide musical journey, and leaves you wanting to listen again, just to see how much it could grow on you.

[Whirlwind / Open Grave] Daniel Jesse

Classic Moments in Christian Rock history

BY DOUG VAN PELT

In 1995, Christafari were invited to perform on the prestigious travelling *Reggae Sunsplash Tour*. It was the first example of what is now a common occurance: bands of faith on major mainstream tours (like *Warped*, *Ozzfest*). The band was booked sight-unseen on the strength of its *Soul Fire* CD. Besides the incredible stamp of legitimacy this put upon the young Christian reggae band, it was actually the first ever tour for Christafari. "It was insane!" affirms vocalist Mark Mohr. "I am still blown away by how much God blessed us straight out of the gate on our first tour. To share the stage with legends like Aswad, Freddy McGregor, Buju Banton, The Wailing Souls, Big Mountain, Sister Carol and Wayne Wonder was surreal! And to be the first Christian act to ever grace a *Sunsplash* festival was an even greater privilege and a tremendous responsibility." An interesting turn of events happened when a pamphlet comparing/contrasting Haile Selassie and Jesus Christ (written by Mohr) circulated its way through the rest of the bands on the tour. The ensuing tension culminated in a knife attack against Mohr by headlining artist Buju Banton in a hotel lobby. When later asked if he'd press charges, Mohr forgave Banton. Incredibly, the tour continued intact and many heart-to-heart conversations amongst the bands have taken place.

For more on this story, go to hmmag.com

THESE 5 DOWN

BY BEAR FRAZER

Brandon Whitlick is at peace this afternoon. The 25 year-old guitarist of These 5 Down is leaning back on his recliner in Flint, Michigan and perusing through a music catalog to check out the latest equipment. "I'm trying to keep up on the new technology," he says, but before he finishes his thought, his little Dachshund breaks the mood by constantly barking. "She thinks she's vicious, but she's not fooling anybody."

Whitlick then grabs his dog and carries her to another room so it's less noisy. About twenty seconds later, he walks back to his recliner, sits back down and begins talking about his group's sophomore album, *Friction*. Something is different though. Their nu-metal style hasn't necessarily changed, but they have matured not only as individuals, but songwriters. "The band has grown a lot as a unit and as a group. I think everybody will notice that the band has really grown," he explains. "There is more variety to the songs and I think there is something on there for a bigger audience. It is so far beyond our first one."

That's understandable. When These 5 Down formed back in late 1997 with vocalist Nathan Bauman, guitarists Whitlick and Justin Pletscher, bassist Rob Brunell and drummer Andy Hittle, they were closing out their teenage years. Although they were youthful, their drive was impeccable. They continuously penned material and toured all throughout Michigan, playing in any nasty bar and club they could. It was a chance recording session, however, which would propel them to another level. "We met with a guy that had a studio. He told us that he knew a few people at Absolute [Records] and if we had some quality material, then he could maybe help us out," he explains. "So we recorded two songs with him and that peaked their interest."

These 5 Down linked up with Absolute in 1999 and a year later, they released their self-titled debut, which features a collection of nu-metal cuts with positive lyrics. They touch up on issues plaguing society and deliver effective messages about taking control of life with "Hymn" and "Low" leading the charge. "It's kinda like a dark truth, but I think it's portrayed in a way that relates to what's going on today," Whitlock explains. "It's upfront about what it has to say. There's nothing hidden."

Lately though, it appears that These 5 Down have been the ones in hiding. For the past seven years, the nu-metal outfit hasn't dropped any new material because they've been on an indefinite hiatus. "There's a big gap in time there," Whitlick admits. "There's just a lot of stuff that went on and then, of course with some of the people we were dealing with, there were inner conflicts."

Some changes had to be made. Andy Hittle decided to leave the band and pursue a different career, whereas Rob Brunell wasn't getting along with the rest of the guys, opting to abandon his post. Those slots were filled by drummer Mike Case and bassist Josh Walker, which finally allowed the new and improved These 5 Down to finish recording their sophomore set *Friction*. The guys continue plugging their motivational science on powerful tracks like "It Ain't Right" and "Can't Wait." Now, they're only steps away from achieving their ultimate goal. "[We] just want people to see the big picture. I think there a lot of people who don't really understand and it's just an endless circle for them. They see no hope and no point, and we just want to bring that to them," he explains. "We wanna give them something they can relate with and hopefully grow a relationship with them."

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LENGSEL

BY TIM HALLILA

For fans of Lengsel, it has been quite a long wait between albums, but a wait that will be rewarded. Formed in the mid-90's, the band's last release came in 2000. Soon after the release of *Solace*, the three members of Lengsel were gradually recruited by their friends in the band Extol. "Tor Magne helped them out on their 1999 U.S. Tour, playing bass," explains Ole Sveen, Lengsel's singer, drummer, and jack of all musical trades. "The following year, John Robert joined on bass, and Tor Magne switched from bass to guitar. After some changes back and forth, we all became members of Extol in 2004. After a few years of touring, Extol frontman Peter Espevoll took a few months off for a honeymoon, and the band took an extended break. Sveen explains, "The three of us then decided to wake Lengsel from its sleep, to record another album. We had a few rehearsals, got a great creative boost, and just started recording. We found out that there was a lot of creative madness there that wouldn't fit into Extol, so that Lengsel was definitely needed."

The result of this creative madness is *The Kiss – The Hope*, an extremely wide-ranging and moody album of experimental metal. The band says the album is meant to be understood as a whole, and it is easy to see why. Musical moods swing from jagged, intense metal riffs, to dark, muddy, haunting melodies and syncopated beats.

Experimentation seems to be a common theme for Lengsel. The fifth song on their album, called "Tales of Lost Love", is a plodding jazz tune that would sound at home in the seediest of smoked-filled jazz clubs. Sveen describes the birth of this song. "It is actually built around a theme from the first song on the album. We were jamming and playing with ideas, and it made for this really weird, dark atmosphere that we wanted on the album. The song after it seems that much more intense because of it. That's what we wanted." The experimentation goes even further, with Sveen not only drumming and singing, but also trying out a few new instruments here and there. Sveen explains, "I love getting my hands on new instruments. I borrowed a friend's accordion for a few months, and there ended up being some accordion on the album. I have gotten my hands on a mandolin and a violin recently, so who knows where that will end up going."

Sveen says Lengsel uses their newfound freedom to create music outside of typical metal boundaries and characteristics. "The only formula we've been using this time is that any idea is worth trying out. If it doesn't work out the first time, we'll try a totally different version of it", he says, while maintaining that he and his bandmates don't view Lengsel as simply a side project from Extol. "Because of our history in Lengsel, I don't think we will ever look at this as a side project, even when Extol takes most of our time and effort. It's a creative fellowship that is close to our hearts and has followed our progress, both as persons and musicians, so it would feel a bit strange to label it a project at all."

While it is unsure when the next Lengsel album might come, *The Kiss – The Hope* certainly whets the appetite for more. For now, Sveen says, Lengsel is just glad to be back. "We're really grateful to all of your fans for waiting so patiently", he says, adding: "Now you finally know we didn't lie when we said Lengsel wasn't dead!" Far from it.

lengsel.com

When the cat's away the mice will play

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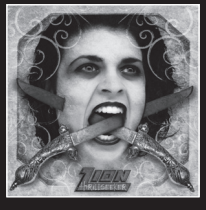

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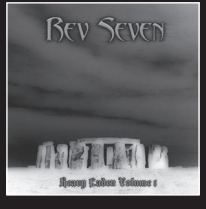

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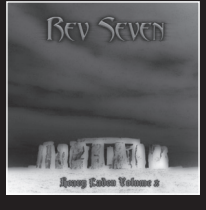

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WAVORLY

BY ADAM NEWTON

Bands, when pressed to make sonic comparisons to themselves, usually have no problem rattling off their musical influences. They'll talk to you about who they listened to growing up. Certain guys will list the specific musicians they loved & modeled their style after, and they might even divulge the identities of the groups they're currently listening to for inspiration or for enjoyment. But rarely will you come upon a band who makes specific, pointed mention of the books they've been reading and which authors hold special meaning to them. It's not that musicians don't read, but more that they want to talk about the music first and everything else a distant 492nd (and there's nothing wrong with that).

But then a band like Wavorly comes along, hoping to change that perception. This Tupelo, MS born-and-bred band has no qualms with gushing over their unabashed love for C. S. Lewis, specifically his Blakean allegory *The Great Divorce*.

"The book holds such a special place in the hearts of all of us in Wavorly," declared Dave Stovall, vocalist, guitar player, and principal lyricist for the band. "Lewis' story of one man's journey through the unending gray monotony that is Hell through the unending joy that is Heaven is a profound stimulus for my writing and provides the band a great vision for who we are and can be."

And the dense lyrical content of the album truly bears out such weighty claims, as several songs contain specific reference to the Oxford don's work. The opening rocker, "Madmen," directly borrows a line and subject matter from Lewis – "We do no good to become madmen." Furthermore, in the juxtaposed songs "Part One" and "Endless Day," the band borrows creatively from Lewis' respective pictures of Hell and Heaven. It's impossible to ignore the genuine spiritual parallels the band intentionally drew upon when making their debut record, *Conquering the Fear of Flight*.

"It's like this – we're not ashamed of the diversity of our style, of the fact we look to a variety of sources for our sound," stated Stovall, rather boldly. "Whether it's the spiritual truths found in Lewis' fiction, the atmospheric sounds of Coldplay, the indie pop of Mae, my education in traditional music theory, or our drummer's love for bands like Dream Theater, we completely embrace our eclectic style as we seek to make music that's true and not cheesy."

The band has come a long way from beginning as a pop-punk act called Freshmen 15 back in their college days. Originally wanting to stay away from record labels, the band morphed into their current melodic rock format, changed the name to Wavorly, and recorded their first record independently. However, even with a growing fanbase and strong support from friends, the band knew that they would have to sign to a label so as to not stress themselves out with management and business decisions.

Stovall speaks plainly about this change: "We're a band; we're musicians. It's not that we couldn't have handled things on our own, but we were already beginning to see signs of stress amongst us when our vision strayed from the music and focused on the business aspects of being a band. But at the same time, we didn't want to sign to just anyone. It was never about being signed, but about finding the right label that understood us and believed in us."

And it seems that Flicker Records is exactly who the band was looking for. After Mark Stuart of Audio Adrenaline (who along with Bob Herdman and Will McGinniss formed the label in 2001) saw their show at Cornerstone in 2006, he informed the guys of his interest in signing the band. At the time, the band was in communication with other labels, but it didn't take long for the band to realize that their search for the right label had come to a close.

"It was truly the greatest experience hooking up with Flicker," asserted Stovall. "We actually thought that our Cornerstone show was one of our worst, because we pressed and forced things too hard and too far trying to be more than we are. But Mark came up to us and told us that we had the energy, intensity, and depth that they were looking for in their bands. And on top of that, after Cornerstone was over, Will McGinniss caught a ride home with us in our van and we all just had a great time. But what really won us over to Flicker was that they kept their commitments to us, whether it was a phone call, e-mail, or whatever. They showed us through their actions that they were genuinely interested in us and wanted the best for us as a band."

Thus, with a love for C. S. Lewis planted firmly in their hearts, the men of Wavorly are looking to tour far & wide, distributing an album that's comprised of equal parts literary allusion, driving rock, contemplative ballads, and an overall passion for sharing their love for music with everyone. Who knows what we might see next from these guys – some *Screwtape Letters* maybe?

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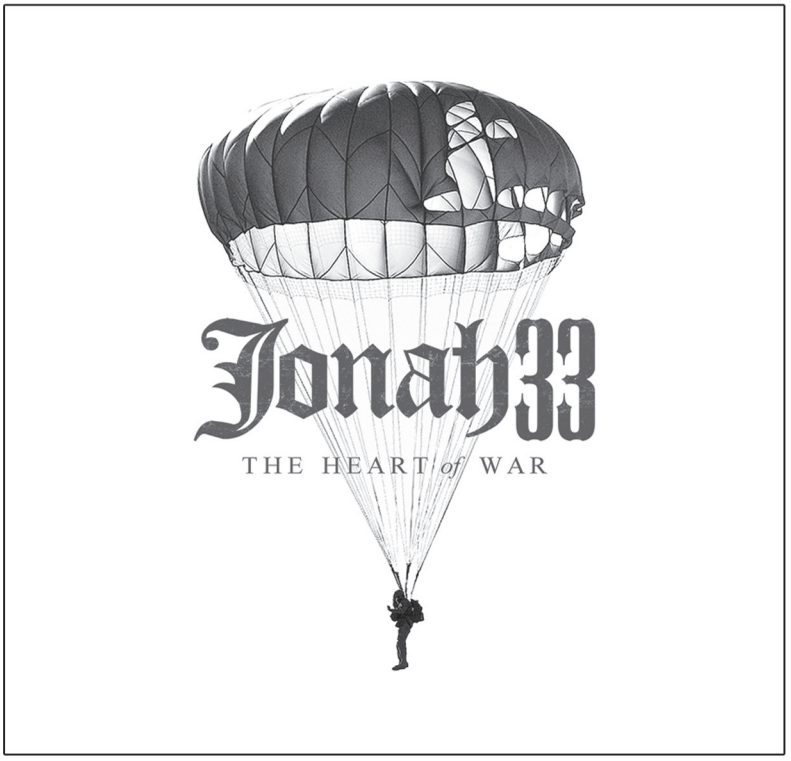

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THE WEDDING

BY ALIXX GRUBER

Fayetteville, Arkansas 2003. Five high-school aged kids decided that they would start a band, and that this band would be called, "The Wedding." A solid work ethic, and the ability to write catchy, spiritual, emotional, and important music brought this band local success, national touring, and eventually label Brave New World came calling. For this band, success came quickly but, don't be fooled, success wasn't handed to them. The Wedding's unwillingness to let high school, member issues, or even the isolation that comes with being from a small town in Arkansas, prevent them from reaching their fullest potential, is what made this band what the are today. With their current lineup, consisting of vocalist Kevin Kiehn, guitarist Trevor Sarver, guitarist/vocalsit Cody Driggers, drummer Joe Rickard, and bassit Jeremy Ervin, the band is stronger than ever, and are finally ready to take over the airwaves.

The Wedding had a excellent start playing popular Christian music festival Cornerstone, located in Bushnell, Illinois, their first year as a band. Now, playing the main stage this year, they're more excited than ever to keep up their tradition. The fact that The Wedding has been a band only four short years hasn't prevented them from touring the entire United States, several times over, playing their music and spreading the "good word" to as many people as possible. Now, with the release of their newest CD, *Polarity*, (released on Brave New World Records, April 17, 2007), expect even more great things from these Arkansas natives.

During the writing of their newest record, things were beginning to get a little more difficult, and not everything was going as well as planned. In January 2006, fresh from their tour with Pillar and Falling Out, they parted ways with their old drummer, Clinton. After dealing with his departure, they began writing *Polarity*. Most of the record was written in Nashville,TN, and then later recorded in Franklin, TN, and Spring Hill, TN. Needless to say, the band was a little more than excited to learn that Mark Lee Townsend would be producing the record. (Prior to producing *Polarity*, Townsend also produced four Relient K albums.) The band tried never to rush the writing/recording process, even though they were far away from their friends and families.

Recently, when I asked guitarist Trevor Sarver, what it is about the new record that should keep fans excited about this band, he answered, "...that, there is probably a little something for almost everyone on this record, and I hope that people are gong to enjoy it. I can honestly say that we are all 100% satisfied with this record." The last (self-titled) record the band put out was written/recorded while the band was still in high school. According to Trevor, the band had a lot of more time to dedicate to writing this record. "During the writing/recording process, we really had to rely on Christ ... there were some personal issues, and band issues that in my opinion, made this record very spiritually based. I really just hope that this is a record that kids will actually hold on to."

theweddingrock.com

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SCOTT LEGER

Photo: Victor Yiu

BY DOUG VAN PELT

Five years or so ago there was a band of believers from Seattle that made the move to Austin, TX to try and further their musical career. Since then, Wide Awake has become quite the Austin Favorite – that is, if you judge winning multiple awards over multiple years in SXSW's Austin Music Awards (just categories like Best Band, Best Rock Band, Best Pop Band, Band of the Year, Best Songwriter, Best Electric Guitar). Or maybe you could say they've become a success if you were watching The Tonight Show last year when 7-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong strolled onstage as the house band played Wide Awake's song, "Maybe Tonight, Maybe Tomorrow."

That song, written by frontman Scott Leger, also won him an individual award for this year's International Songwriting Competition. His agent in Nashville entered the song without Leger or the band knowing. He called Leger, surprising him, when it made it to the final round. Then he got another call when he won. "There's, like, 15,000 entries in this thing, so you'll never think you'll win. It's still pretty surreal."

Candace Avery, the founder and director of ISC, applauds Leger, stating, "'Maybe Tonight, Maybe Tomorrow' is a song that all of us can relate to and draw strength from. Leger brings a passion and purpose to his songwriting that is inspirational and timeless." In response to winning ISC, Leger says, "As a songwriter, it kind of validates – with the judges being who they are (Tom Waits, Brian Wilson, Jerry Lee Lewis, Rosanne Cash, Robert Smith, among others) and the amount of people who enter. There's so many competitions out there. It feels pretty legit. The song is important to me and to my close friends, and it's been kind of able to leak out to other people. I feel like winning the contest is just kind of gonna kind of help it achieve its mission – and that was just to inspire people. And now with iTunes on board, it's actually raising funds. We just surpassed the 10,000 download mark. It's a cool thing for me to be a part of. I've been writing songs for more than ten years and this is by far the greatest thing I've ever done – for all those reasons."

Written after the news that a close friend was diagnosed with cancer (who's still doing great), the song has since become the anthem for the Lance Armstrong Foundation's *Live Strong* campaign (you've probably seen the yellow bracelets). "We contacted iTunes and they both donated it, so all the 99 cents goes to the LAF."

When meeting up with Leger at a Mute Math show in Austin in May, I had to ask him what it was like to hang out with Armstrong. "You feel fat and out of shape when you hang out with that guy. His passion for the bike is obvious, but his passion to help people fight this disease is so inspiring."

Amidst all the activity for Leger is also a transition for the band Wide Awake, which has been kind of on an extended break for a time. "The 'Maybe Tonight, Maybe Tomorrow' recording is probably gonna be our last thing for awhile," Leger explains. They're coming off their best year ever in 2006, playing all over (including overseas), but haven't played in several months. Leger is playing out solo a little bit and working at Gateway Church in Austin (with former Sixpence bassist, JJ Placencio), but the band, per se, is currently without plans. "I think this is a season of change for the band. It's for the better. We've always tried to be about our families, and that's the main priority right now. Travelling isn't too conducive, but making music is, so we're trying to figure out what that means now."

He makes me feel fat and lazy.

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KEKAL

BY MIKE LARSON

Jeff Arwadi is one creative individual, his band Kekal's latest offering *The Habit of Fire* is an eclectic collection of diverse aural soundscapes, transcending both genre and formula. I was able to correspond via the net recently with Jeff and thought I would share the meat of the conversation here.

Michael Larson: The latest album is great, a serious contender for album of the year. IMO the mixture of the organic and high tech sounds are amazing to me... How do you approach writing this?
Jeff: Wow, thanks for the compliment.. I'm glad you like the album.. Well, that's a long story.. I've been into this crossing-genre kind of freak for years.. In 1992 me and my high-school friends formed a somewhat experimental punk/thrash band called Sonic Warfare (then became Inner Warfare in 1994). That happened because my other band mates are not metal heads. One guy was into punk and rap, and the other guy was into electronica, jazz & R&B, and I was heavily into thrash & death metal at that time.. So when we tried to write our own songs we always had arguments, so the only solution was to put all our influences and make a crazy hybrid of music. Inner Warfare had few demo tapes before we disbanded ourselves for good. When I joined Kekal, at the first years, I was excited because all my metal repression from Inner Warfare era was finally released, and I was like "let's play super fast blastbeats and the meanest shrieks and growls". It was like a huge catharsis, you know.. But in 1999 - 2000, during the recording of *Embrace the Dead*, I felt something missing. In the bottom of my heart, I missed my Inner Warfare days, and wished to make some cross-genre experiment in the music again, and I was already a death metal freak for about 12 years on that time, it was time to broaden my horizon. Then came *The Painful Experience* album, which was our first step into this experimental direction, and from that point we go further and further each album.

Please talk about what drives you as an artist?
...In my mind, I never want to make music just for fun, or for money or fame or whatever. But only for the passion with the music itself. I believe that music can be a medium for self-expression, and it is a perfect medium for self expression.. I'm only able to express myself through music, I couldn't do with any other media..

How hard has it been to learn to express yourself thru Kekal?
Wow! That's a difficult question… You know, it's all about learning, and it's all about process. In this case, I've been 'fortunate' enough to have some sort of 'mentor' that is my father, to teach me about expressing yourself. He didn't teach about lessons or any other thing, like probably art schools do, but it was all about to connect your emotions, feelings and thoughts into the medium.

...really what art's about.
In my case, I've chosen music because I tried to become a painter at one time, but failed. haha.. It is really different between expressing yourself through music, and paintings or drawings, and through some poetry or literature. They are all art, but it is different in each individual. Sometimes you feel that you're better or fit most in expressing yourself through one medium than another. I couldn't do artwork in sense of expressing myself to that. When I do cover artwork, for me it's more of visual communication rather than art.

Grateful for dad

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AFTER EDMUND

BY CHRIS CALLAWAY

Georgia's modern rock quintet, After Edmund, is dangerous. Vocalist/guitarist Mitch Parks, bassist Matt McFadden, guitarist Ben Hosey, keyboardist Yates, and drummer Adam Stanley are a magnet for bruises, split lips, and, well, aquatic-related pain. "Matt and I were camp counselors at this camp in Tennessee," Parks explains, detailing one of the many memorable mishaps. "So we're at this camp and the rest of the guys come up. All the kids are gone and we're waiting on the next group to come for the next week. The camp staff is like, 'Hey, let's go to this huge waterfall. There's this river that's 40 feet off the ground. Let's just go jump in,' so we're like, 'Cool, let's go.' We start jumping off this big rock. I jump in and no problem. Matt jumps in, no problem. Ben goes and everybody else is going and Yates [keyboards] is last. Yates comes up to jump into this thing and slips when he jumps at the very top and bellyflops from 40 feet." Quickly, the band realized the gravity of the situation and wondered if their keyboardist had met with an untimely death. "They yelled for me," Yates recalls with a certain degree of eyebrow-twitching pain, "'Are you okay?' and my reply was, 'No.' It was painful, I assure you."

More recently, Yates bloodied Mitch's lip during a Gospel Music Association showcase. He was jumping around and happened to somehow slam into the astonished singer with the force of a juggernaut. Regardless, Parks reports, the show continued and the guys were able to continue performing in pre-release support of their debut, *Hello*, which hits the street in July.

There should be no reason why the album will not create a sizeable stir. The dozen tunes that inhabit *Hello* are well-executed in terms of the instrumentation and vocal delivery. There are plenty of arena hooks, powerful vocals, loud guitars, creative drum parts and atmospheric keyboard and guitar tracks to keep radio listeners well-fed and radio programmers clambering for more. The tones and production on the record are noteworthy and make the songs shine. It's certainly evident that recording sessions were not pumped into a friend's ProTools system in his mother's basement where breaks had to be taken when someone threw in a load of wash. Instead, the record label slackened any grip that may have been secured to the corporate wallet and allowed the guys to record at Georgia's Southern Tracks. "It was kind of wild to be in that studio and sit in the same drum room where all these albums you listened to growing up had been tracked," Stanley reminisces. "I'm thinking, this is Pearl Jam, Stone Temple Pilots; Bruce Springsteen's been in there, I mean, everybody. They have all this incredible gear and it's just … what an experience! It was like going to Disneyland for a week and living there."

While the time in the Disneyland-like studio, full of history and massive tone offerings helped shape *Hello* into a solid modern rock offering, the band is decidedly traditional on the lyrical approach. Parks, McFadden and cohorts decided to keep the message simple, evangelical, empathetic and understandable, without judgmental finger-pointing. "When people listen to the record, we hope they enjoy it for music's sake," Stanley comments. "But most of all, I hope they walk away with a sense of honesty, if you will, about our situation as human beings. The Gospel is that we have nothing to offer of our own and that we're messed up and absolutely need God and we need Christ."

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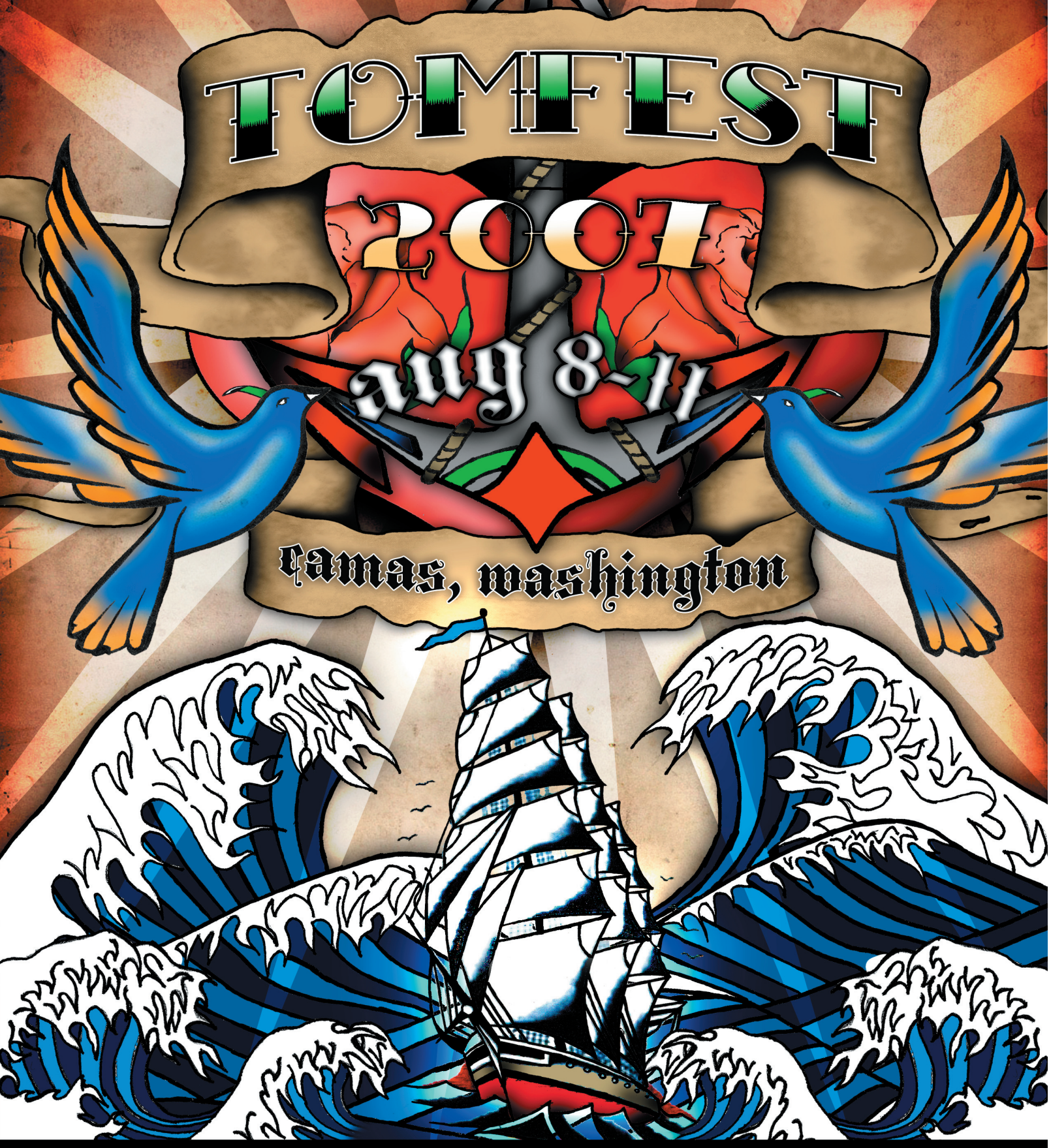

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Maria Mckee

YOU CAN DANCE IF YOU WANT TO

BY DOUG VAN PELT

"*LATE DECEMBER* IS AN ALBUM FROM A COUPLE OF ARTISTS WHO ARE WORKING TOGETHER TO GET TO THE CORE OF: 'WHAT KIND OF ALBUM WOULD YOU MAKE IF YOU HAD ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD AND NOBODY TELLING YOU WHAT TO DO AND LOOKING OVER YOUR SHOULDER, AND YOU BASICALLY HAD A STUDIO IN YOUR BEDROOM AND YOU'RE BEST FRIENDS AND MARRIED."

That kind of says it all for Maria McKee on her latest musical offering – *Late December*, a beautiful array of musical expressions – from Lone Justice-like anthems ("Too Many Heroes") to jilted love sonnets ("Starving Pretty") to the sultry ballad turned Gospel choir send-off that is the title track. If it has a fault it's that it's so diverse. One critic's trash is another's treasure, and this one is chock full of heartfelt soul. She brought her A-game to this one and it's a marvelous thing to behold.

It's not easy to write songs in today's "Post-Music Business Generation," but Maria and husband, Jim Akin, work together in one of those marital-bliss best-friends-forever relationships that we can all envy. She was in Europe when her husband wrote a track that reminded him of the wonders of New York in the winter time, around late December. "I tried to imagine when I used to live there. He sorta painted the picture for me in a sort of cinematic way and it was up to me to put the lyrics together. You know, writing songs is a very mysterious thing. It always has been for me. I hear something in my head and I hum it at three times quarter. Or I'll just sit down on the piano and start fiddling around, you know. So, it's, like they say, it's different every time. There's no formula for me. I'm just sort of held captive by inspiration."

One very visual lyric she penned on this album is the humorous "Cat In The Wall," where a new resident finally tires of the incessant howling and squalling of a nearby feline. The neighbors wonder when she'll have enough of it and bet wages on the timing of the cat's impending death. When she finally does the dirty deed, she marvels how no one notices that it's gone. Quite the funny tale. The inspiration is metaphoric of McKee's sometimes lonely songwriting process. "For me I was going through a period where I felt really abandoned by my friends and family," she laughs (something she does a lot in our friendly interview). "There were times when I was sort of locked away writing and I felt like I was going nuts. You feel like you're living in a glass house and people are looking in – 'What do they see? How do you describe what they would see if they could see?' It's like clawing skin away. It's an odd feeling. Writing can be a very existential experience. Sometimes you feel as if you're metamorphosing, I guess, into a creature, almost." Let's hope no one disposes of her late night singing anytime soon.

A few years ago Geffen Records released a *Millennium Collection* anthology of the prolific singer/songwriter. She hearkens back to her early days and laments at all the stress, lack of confidence and minor circumstances that sometimes stifled or prevented her from enjoying sweet moments – like the Lone Justice performance on *Saturday Night Live* many moons ago. She can relate to and empathize with young artists that are suddenly catapulted into the public's eye with their art. Not every 19-year old in the world ends up in a recording studio with Bob Dylan and members of the Rolling Stones lingering, though. "Everybody's hanging out and playing on your record and you're just kind of going, 'How did I get here?'" Now she's a lot more comfortable in her skin.

"I don't have a lot to complain about, because I'm working outside of the major label system and I have so much freedom. I can make an album any time I want and I can make any kind of album that I want – as long as I have somebody to put it out. It's great. I have what I always wanted, which is freedom and creative control. And confidence to do what I want."

And we, the listening audience, are the better for it.

✖

For a special treat, check out the music of Maria's dear departed brother, Bryan Maclean, who wrote songs for the 60s buzz band, Love, and then went on to write specifically Christian music later before his untimely death. [bryanmaclean.com] (Also, to read the raw Q&A of our Maria McKee interview online, go to hmmag.com)

HIGH FLIGHT SOCIETY

BY MATT CONNER

Usually a band's list of influences lends some level of credibility by dropping names of rock legends or indie superstars or Brit-rock greats with the hope that fans of the larger names will give the brand new band a listen. For High Flight Society, they're hoping the opposite rings true.

"There aren't many bands who can claim influences ranging from Green Day to Johnny Cash to the Gaither Vocal Band and old hymnals," explains 22-year-old vocalist Jason Wilkes. "So we think that alone sets us apart."

How does a band compile such a diverse list? Growing up in Cedartown, Georgia, a tight-knit community of 10,000, can't hurt. It was there that Wilkes and his bandmates played together for years through high school and even sang in southern gospel quartets in their various churches. Eventually that gave way to more progressive tastes, trading suits and four-part harmonies for guitars and soaring melodies.

In fact, you would never know the guys in High Flight Society didn't grow up listening to the stuff of legends. Their tight musicianship and strong rock sensibilities allow them to stand alongside other recent modern rock debuts, including some influences that "fit" like the Sanctus Real and Foo Fighters. "Everyone says 'You've never heard music like ours before' and that's not true," says Wilkes. "You have heard our music before, but just not the way we play it. It's in the way we execute it and try to keep it fresh. No matter how many times you've listened to the song, you can always find something else that we put in there to keep it new."

A big part of developing that level of artistry was due to producer Tony Palacios (Decyfer Down), who Wilkes notes was not only great to work with professionally but as impressive personally. "Working with Tony was great. He's such a great guy. He's really good at what he does but he also knows how to keep it fun. He has a great heart and just basically any good quality a person can have, Tony has it… I almost wish we could have messed up more, just to have to spend more time in the studio with him."

Getting the word out has been more troublesome, however, than the band could have known. Between failed record deals and even dissolved labels, High Flight Society has played together five years without a debut album. Thus, the June release of their self-titled debut comes with a sigh of relief. "We've went through so much stuff it's ridiculous," says Wilkes. "We've seen developmental record deals and halfway record deals that were supposed to happen, but never did. Then we finally signed with Selectric Records, which was owned by John and Dino Elefante. But that label went under and so they shopped around our deal and album and set up a showcase in Nashville for RKT. The word was that they weren't gonna sign us, but I guess we ended up convincing them."

Wilkes laughs at that last statement, yet underneath the lighter note lays a certain level of nervous anticipation of a day long awaited. "For us, [the anticipation] is actually pretty huge," says Wilkes. "It's way more than most other bands, I would say, since we actually recorded the record in March of 2006. There has been release date after release date. We kept getting put off and put off until finally, after signing the deal with RKT, they gave us a release date for sure and it's finally happening. We're elated!"

hfsrock.com

Isn't that the guy from guardian?

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THE CONFESSION

BY WILL THOMPSON

Few bands can claim to have been signed before playing their first official show, and fewer, it seems, can say they kicked addiction after recording their first album. The Confession claims both.

"Our then guitarist-now bassist's little brother went to school with the guy whose dad owns the label we're on now, Record Collection," says Taylor Holland Armstrong, vocalist of The Confession. "[Our bassist's] little brother brought a demo to school and some other kid heard it and gave it to his dad and he came to our practice and said, 'I'd like to sign you guys.' It was cool, but at the same time, we didn't get to build that core fanbase as a lot of bands who just (bleep) truck it for a long time. It has its upsides and downs."

The Confession hail from Orange County, CA and it's been two and a half years since that fateful practice session. Ever since, they've been touring hard and showcasing their brand of hard rock. Their first full-length, *Requiem*, was recently released on Science Records. The album embraces influences from hard rock genres across the board, from screamo to metal.

In addition to cutting their teeth while bearing the weight of being signed to a label and attempting to make a mark in a genre that is currently flooded, the band has had significant internal struggle. Armstrong went into rehab after the band finished recording *Requiem*.

"I know I have to stay away from certain people on the road that I used to get stuff. I've become a better band member and better singer in terms of working harder and not being out of it. I'm able to fully care and dedicate myself to the band instead of being a little hazy. I think it's definitely for the best. I began working out when I got home and I'm not out of breath anymore at the shows and I'm not forgetting lyrics or being an idiot. It's a lot easier."

While things are currently on a better note for Armstrong and the band, the darkness and frustration of dealing with addiction are ever-present on *Requiem*. The album art bears religious imagery such as cherubs, rosaries; as if song titles as "Burn the Virgin" and "No Angel" weren't telling enough.

"I'm the only religious member in the band, and it's something I think I struggle with a lot in terms of my lyrics. It always seems like a fight between trying to do the right thing and drawn in by the worldly things and things that make you happy. During the recording of that album I was battling a problem with drugs, so that's where a lot of that came from. I would say I'm a believer in Jesus Christ. I wouldn't say I'm Catholic Christian; whatever that is. I try to go by what his teachings were. I would say I fall short all the (bleep) time, but that's my thing."

With addiction currently on the sidelines, the band has the second leg of the 2007 *Warped Tour* on its mind.

"We played *Warped Tour* last year and I think we made a good impression," says Armstrong. "*Warped Tour* is such a gamble, cause there's so many other bands that are bigger than us and might be playing at the same time. I don't know what the (bleep) gonna happen. We want to do everything as long as we don't have to change the way we sound for anyone else. If MTV or whoever it is accepts our music for what it is, we're fully down for that."

theconfessionmusic.com

The little brother connection

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DELIVERANCE - THE FIRST FOUR YEARS
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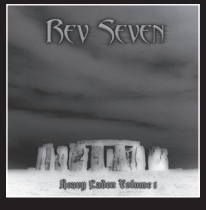
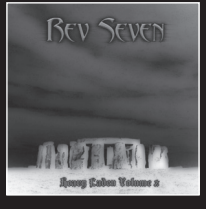


REV SEVEN - VOLUME 1 (two albums on one CD, 20 songs)
REV SEVEN - VOLUME 2 (two albums on one CD, 20 songs)
Guitarist, Bill Menchen (Titanic, Final Axe, Seventh Power) re-recorded all the songs from his legendary unreleased demo session with his band from the early 90's. No one does an Ozzy and Black Sabbath impersonation better than Rev Seven!



REDEEMER - ANNO DOMINI ('84-89)
REDEEMER - DOUBLE EDGED SWORD ('84-89)
Re-recorded unreleased songs from one of Bill Menchen's first bands.
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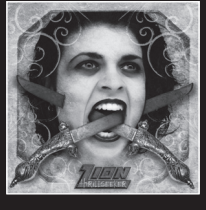

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To India, A RESCUE MISSION *with love*

BY BILL & NICOLE McCHAREN

IN JANUARY 2007, FACELESS INTERNATIONAL, A NON-PROFIT, CO-FOUNDED BY ANBERLIN'S VOCALIST STEPHEN CHRISTIAN AND FRIEND, SARAH FREEMAN, SPONSORED A TRIP TO KOLKATA, INDIA WITH MEMBERS FROM SHOWBREAD, ANBERLIN, HUNDRED YEAR STORM, AND CLASSIC CRIME AS WELL AS STAFF FROM TO WRITE LOVE ON HER ARMS (TWLOHA) AND MEMBERS OF XXX CHURCH. THIS TRIP WAS THE FIRST MOVE FOR THE NEWLY FOUNDED FACELESS INTERNATIONAL TO HELP BRING AWARENESS ABOUT HUMAN TRAFFICKING, THE MODERN DAY PRACTICE OF SLAVERY, IN INDIA AND AROUND THE WORLD.

"I felt like I was in a mix of the *National Geographic* magazine and the *Crazy Taxi* video game," Matt MacDonald, vocalist of Classic Crime, explained about his initial impressions of Kolkata, India. "It felt like the four of us crammed in the taxi couldn't decide whether to scream for our lives or for the people we saw on the street. It was shocking, to say the least." It was clear at this point in the trip that navigating this foreign city would prove to be challenging and different. For many of the volunteers, this was their first time on a trip like this. Deon Rexroat, bassist of Anberlin said, "My first thoughts were, 'What have I gotten myself into?' But that quickly changed after I met everyone at Apne Aap and realized what we would be doing and how much of an impact it could potentially have."

In one of the red light districts, the group walked the busy streets filled with people, homeless dogs, beggars, and waste; but this was not what impacted them most. It was watching a 16-year-old girl standing on the corner for sale surrounded by her peers dressed in provocative clothing. Many children also ran freely on the streets. The group visited a late night shelter for the children in the midst of the red light district and Jamie Tworkowski, founder of TWLOHA, was deeply moved, "Today was when everything changed for me. Ten little girls live in the shelter as either their mothers are prostitutes or dead. It was heavy beyond words, I wanted to cry, scream, fight."

UNICEF estimates that 1.2 million children are trafficked each year primarily for sexual exploitation and cheap labor. Many of the young girls that are sold into sexual slavery, are kidnapped, deceived, or drugged. After being sold to the brothel for about $1,000 dollars, they are beaten, malnourished, and forced to have sex. Many of the girls contract AIDS or other STDs. When Christian and Freeman first learned about this, they were burdened to learn more first-hand and spread awareness. They formed Faceless International to focus on educating, equipping, and mobilizing the willing through first-hand, real-life experiences in places of need all around the world. Faceless International also has a unique focus on the music scene, because of Christian's obvious influence. After understanding how severe the problem of sex trafficking is in India, they felt like it was a good place to go learn more about the issue. They made connections with Stateside non-profit, The Emancipation Network (TEN), to partner together in a trip to Kolkata, India.

TEN has been fighting trafficking since 2005. They partner with anti-trafficking organizations to economically empower survivors of trafficking or those at risk of being trafficked through development of craft programs. They import and sell these handicrafts in the U.S. In their first eight months of operation, they sent over $50,000 back to their overseas partners, which paid a salary to many of the girls making the handicrafts, supported trafficking prevention, legal aid, and rescue being done by their partners. Their work provides opportunities for survivors to live independently, provides an alternative to those at risk, and helps support anti-trafficking organizations. They have also been educating Americans about human trafficking all over the nation through small group settings where these handicrafts are sold. TEN routinely visits their anti-trafficking partner organizations several times a year to ensure fair practices and maintain positive relationships and communication.

The vision of the trip was to learn more about human trafficking, assist the anti-trafficking partner organizations, and for the bands to adopt the issue of human trafficking as an issue they want to educate their fans about with the possibility of selling Made By Survivor (TEN) products on their tours. "It only costs about $80 a month for one girl to be fully employed and to live independently outside the shelter. When the older girls become independent, this also makes room at the shelter for new survivors," explained Chandranath Nag, San Laap's craft director.

Deon Rexroat expressed the following: "I was intrigued by the idea of the trip, but I had no idea what we would actually see and experience. I honestly had few expectations and mainly just wanted to be helpful in some way." Throughout the week the group worked at Apne Aap's Kiddepore Center, located blocks away from a red light district, leading a week of workshops for the children in music, dance, and art. The end of the week finished with a grand finale where the groups presented a dance, music, and a mural and shared a meal. These times of music and art brought joy and hope to the Kiddepore Center. "A highlight of the trip was singing and playing with the kids. They laughed and played and sang in the face of such adversity, it brought a new kind of joy to my heart," shared Matt McDonald.

From Tuesday through Thursday, small groups from the team started going out to the San Laap shelter to visit and volunteer amongst survivors. Trisha Ivy, staff member of To Write Love on Her Arms, shared her experience, saying: "I sat next to a girl who had been forced into prostitution. She was rescued out of it at the age of 13. How long she had been in it, I don't know. She sat with me and sang for me her favorite song. She told me of her past, her family that is gone, and how at night, crying on her pillow, she sings herself to sleep." The workshops were a success and the girls had a lot of fun doing the arts, crafts, songs, and music and the team was deeply moved in many ways.

Despite the horror of human trafficking, heroes and survivors emerge out of the tragedy. Many women and girls have overcome the horrors committed against them and are now fighting against it. The volunteers' lives were changed forever. Rexroat said, "I haven't stopped thinking about Apne Aap, San Laap, and the girls there. What changed me the most was meeting and working with the girls and being able to put a human face on the problem." At this time, many of the bands have partnered with TEN and will begin selling Made By Survivor products at their live shows. Bill McCharen, lead singer of Hundred Year Storm, said, "My life is marked forever. We hope to spread awareness about the issue and see freedom and hope brought to these girls as well as others rise up to fight this atrocity."

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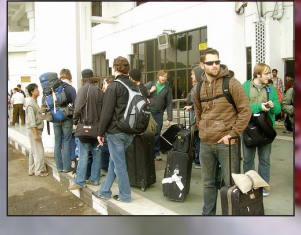


Photos: Clint McManaman // www.elclinto.com

RESOURCES & BOOKS

The Emancipation Network

The Emancipation Network fights against human trafficking through economic empowerment. They import and sell handicrafts made by survivors of trafficking or those at risk of being trafficked to help in order to provide help to survivors, prevent trafficking of high risk girls, and support the anti-trafficking work of overseas partners.

[*madebysurvivors.com*]

International Justice Mission

International Justice Mission is a human rights agency that rescues victims of violence, sexual exploitation, slavery, and oppression. Their website has many different resources for those interested in fighting against human trafficking as well as raising awareness amongst families and youth. See below for a couple examples of the resources they have available online.

[*ijm.org*]

The Justice Mission

"The Justice Mission" is a collaborative effort between International Justice Mission and Youth Specialties. The program is a video-enhanced youth curriculum reflecting the heart of God for the oppressed of the world. It is a 5-session study series that takes you inside the work of the International Justice Mission, a Christian human rights agency, to see the reality of injustice in the world, and what you can do about it.

Apne Aap Women Worldwide

Apne Aap is an organization located in India whose mission is to end sex trafficking of women and children.

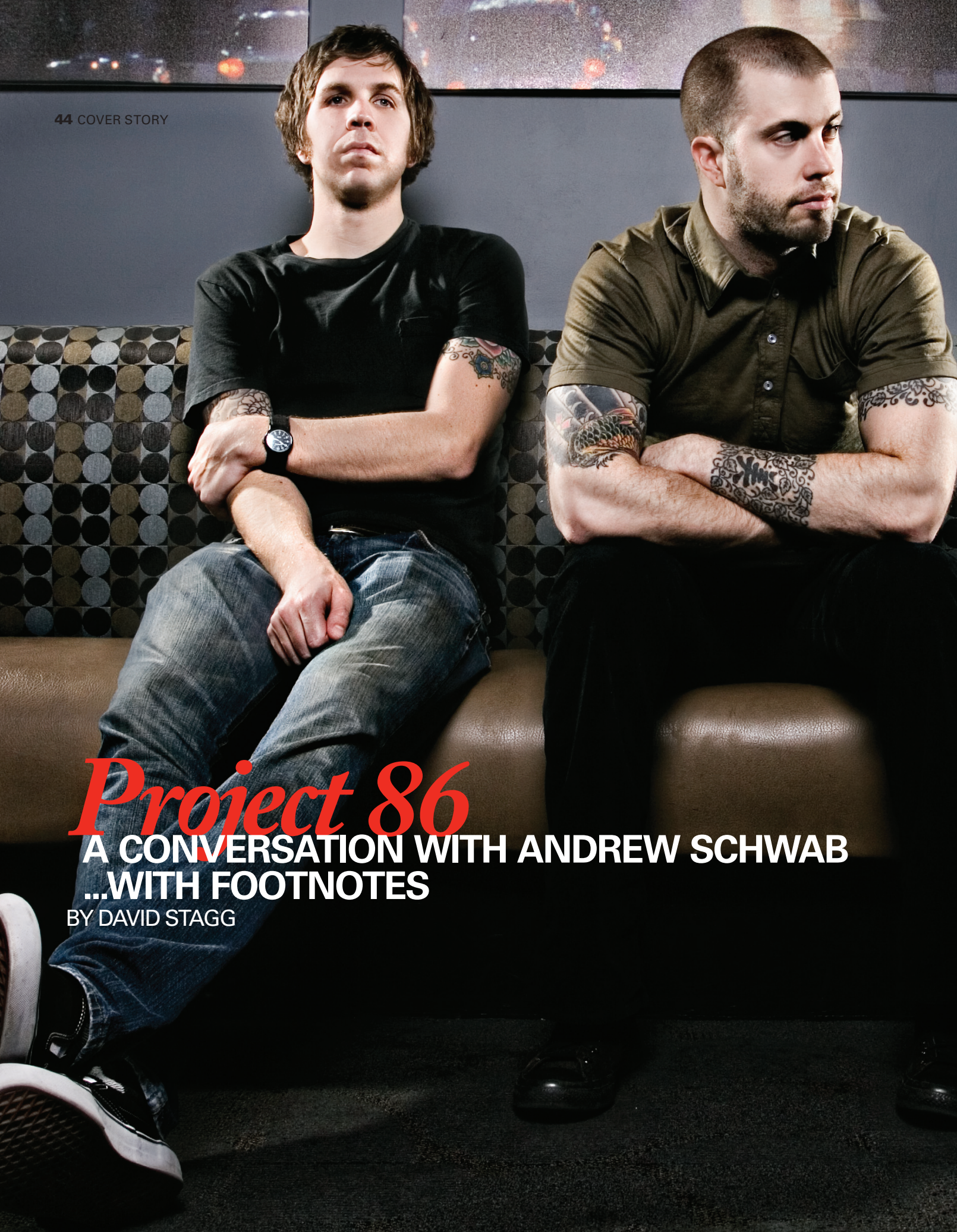
[*apneaap.org*]

Terrify No More

This gripping book documents the events leading up to, and surrounding, IJM's raids in the notorious Cambodian village of Svay Pak where their workers rescued 37 underage victims of sex-trafficking, many of them under the age of 10.

Good News About Injustice

Interspersed with individual stories of specific abuse, this book chronicles the vision behind IJM's work and seeks to tackle tragic injustices with practical insight, answering tough questions regarding the nature of injustice and the biblical mandate for Christians to confront it.



Project 86

A CONVERSATION WITH ANDREW SCHWAB ...WITH FOOTNOTES

BY DAVID STAGG

You could call Andrew Schwab a renaissance man of sorts. He's written three books, is an independent journalist, but is more commonly known to you and me for the initial reason he came into the game—as lead singer for the rock band Project 86.

I have to be honest in that when I'm called upon to do work for HM, it is usually a labor of love. I've had the opportunity to speak with some of the more influential people in the music business, and usually they are the reasons I listen to music in the first place. Project 86 is one of those bands. And knowing that Schwab is a very creative person, we had gotten in touch a few times and tossed around a few ideas for this story, hoping to come up with some collaborative, brilliant piece. But after e-mails and when we talk on the phone for the second time, we got to the heart of what's important to Schwab: conversation.

He is definitely a talker. He speaks in long paragraphs, but his syntax is still down to earth, and he explains his opinions and feelings in ways that make it easy for you to grasp, whether you agree with him or not. Right now, his band is on the brink of their sixth full-length release, *Rival Factions*, and by the time you read this, you'll probably have already heard it. Six records is a pretty impressive feat for any band, let alone Project, who almost lost it along the way. Schwab and his bandmates have two fundamental beliefs when it comes to writing music:

a) No two records should ever sound the same. If they do, the band needs to end.

b) That when you're comfortable, you're stagnant.[1] You're not moving, you're not shaking, you're not challenging yourself, and you're not making good things. It was their goal with the band's new record to force themselves outside their comfort zone, to write music that was distinctly themselves, but distinctly *different* from what they'd written before. It's a difficult balance, and it's extremely difficult when trying to retain a fan base.

This brings us to the name of the record, *Rival Factions*. When I was speaking with Schwab, we got kind of wrapped up in conversation, and I made the mistake of forgetting to ask about the title. But he brought it up. He wanted to make sure you knew about it. The sound of the name of the record is confrontational.[2] This is intentional, because Schwab believes confrontation forces you to face your fears, and in this case, the band itself was forced to confront any kind of worry they might have had about perceptions surrounding the new record.

Another one of the fears Schwab and his bandmates had to face was the way that they actually chose to record the album. Contrary to what most bands do—get together in the studio, jam, write songs, come up with a record—Project actively decided to write the entire record in different parts of the world.

He's not kidding. If they wanted to, they could have easily decided to do the thing all in one spot. Instead, while the bass player was in the Netherlands and the guitar player was in Seattle and the vocalist was in Orange County, they put together what became *Rival Factions*. Let me share with you the example that Schwab gave me,

1 Actual quote number one: "Purposefully so, there's this philosophy that we have as people that's really important to our band and that's when we're comfortable, we're stagnant. So if we can make ourselves be uncomfortable, if we can push ourselves to feel that sense of challenge or insecurity, that's where good things are going to happen."

2 The title's purpose is three-fold, the first being the in-your-face, confrontational sound to push limits. The second is the idea that Project 86 needed to make a record that confronted the current trends in music right now. "The other idea," Schwab says, "was more of a spiritual connotation, like rival factions within the human soul, the warring factions within us and the tension is where the soul lies. Dark/light, old man/new man type of thing." It essentially was the very purpose of the record: "Spiritual life is kind of like two rottweilers," he continues, "and they are eventually going to battle one another and kill one another as they grow older. And the one you feed the most is the one that gets biggest and wins and kills the other one. That's the idea of the spiritual life."

Photo: Neil Visel

the typical songwriting process on this album, to help you understand how it is possible: Steven Dail, bassist for the band, would write a song, lay down drums, guitar, keys, record it, and send it to Schwab. Schwab would then put down some vocals, then send it to Randy Torres, guitarist. Torres would do some arranging, add some more guitar parts, change things around … and so on and so forth. They would do this until they had a finished song. Then, when pre-production for the record came around, the three would get together with the drummer, *then* finally jam the song. Quite an unorthodox process, to say the least.

Sure, there were adjustments to be made, but the songwriting process as mentioned above was a first for the band. The motivation to write the record in such a manner stemmed from the fact that they all had things to do outside the band, and it made more sense to write it from where they were at. Actually, at the very least, that's the logical reason. As it turns out, that was only part of the reason. And, as usual, Schwab had a hidden purpose for it.

I talked with Schwab about it being unconventional, that most bands, when they want to write a record, want to spend time together, write the record together, and hole themselves up in a secluded cabin together. I asked him if this approach benefited the album, and he answered that, in doing so, it made each of the band members individually stronger as songwriters, and that when the band finally came together in pre-production, they already had completed songs. The only thing to do from that point was choose the final tracks.

I'll go ahead and say it for those of you that need to hear it: If you're already a fan of Project 86, the best thing to do is not expect another *Drawing Black Lines*. Don't expect another *And the Rest Will Follow*, either. The best thing to do is expect the unexpected. Project has always approached things this way; they've been through some rough spots, putting out records that consist of a different feel, whether the fans were ready for it or not.[3] For example, when it was time to release *Truthless Heroes* and it didn't go over as well as planned,[4] Schwab admits he wishes there might have been songs closer to those in the style of *Drawing Black Lines*. Never put out the same record; there's no progress in that.

After all, the best songs are the most spontaneous. If Schwab and Torres and Dail had tried to actively write a record like *Drawing Black Lines*, or in this case, like *And the Rest Will Follow*, it would have been forced; and, in all likelihood, sound like it was trying too hard. Instead, the band forced themselves outside that box and tried to make a record with songs that speak to people, with songs that just come out, with songs that are, more or less, divinely appointed.

If a song's good enough, it's a reason to buy a CD in and of itself. Schwab can remember times when he bought a CD solely to listen to one or two songs, and even though the others were crap, it was still worth buying the record.

"…I would have loved to have had a couple songs on there that were closer to 'P.S.,' and 'Stein's Theme', but you can't repeat yourself—that's the whole point. You can't force those kinds of songs to come out. You can't control that."

It's those songs that Project 86 are searching for. If you can make an entire record full of those types of songs, you've made a record that people are going to remember. If you make a record on which half the songs are those types of songs, you've made a good record.

Part of achieving that is refusing to limit yourself. It's an interesting dynamic in the life of a band; when you're just starting out, if you pigeon-hole yourself and, as a band, set out to sound a certain way, give off a certain image, the public can confine you and box you in to a certain style. Project never wanted to end up in that place, but inevitably, they did. Simply by starting out playing Christian festivals in the style of music they did, it forced them there, even though they had no intentions of being a nu-metal band.[5]

They've released enough records since then that for the most part this isn't a problem. What it did lead to, however, was establishing *Drawing Black Lines* as the record that defined them. I asked Schwab which record defines them as a band, and he answered as such. But he misunderstood the question. I wanted to know the answer in his opinion and not the fans.' The answer? All of them.[6]

So if all goes planned, *Rival Factions* will be a record you remember. It's already something that Project 86 is proud of. Finally, in Schwab's own words: "I think nowadays, we're just thankful for all the opportunities we've been given. We enjoy writing music, we enjoy playing and using our gifts and talents in such a way that hopefully it makes a lasting impression on people, both spiritually and musically, instead of, 'Hey, that band wrote a cool song once.'"

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3 Actual quote number two: "Hindsight's always 20/20. I would have loved to have had a couple songs on there that were closer to 'P.S.' and 'Stein's Theme', but you can't repeat yourself—that's the whole point. You can't force those kinds of songs to come out. The best songs that we've written are the ones that have just come out—you can't control that."

4 Although now *Truthless Heroes* does have a cult following, and has come to, in Schwab's mind, form a very distinct line in the band's history: "We hear a lot more today that *Truthless Heroes* is a fan favorite," he says, "which is weird, because people didn't really connect with it when it first came out. It has this cult thing about it now. It's strange. I look at there being two distinct eras in our band: pre-*Truthless Heroes*, and post-*Truthless Heroes*. It's almost like two separate bands, two separate lives. It's young and innocent, and then after that, it's, basically, you really understand how everything works; you have a more adult perspective on things."

5 Actual quote number three: "You know, a lot of bands when they start out, they say, 'This is what we're going to be, this is what we're going for, this is how we want to look, this is what we're gong to project, this is the style of music that we're going to play.' Most bands are confined by their own definitions. I mean, the style of music you play makes sense, but it creates this box thing you have to stay inside of. When we started, we wanted to take all the hardcore bands that were legit, and wanted to expand on that and make it a little more commercial, a little more accessible. We never wanted to be rap metal."

6 Actual quote number four: "I can't really say, because each record is like a snapshot of our lives at that point in time. It's like a little yearbook. I have my favorite year of high school, or my favorite year of college, but I still have yearbooks from each one, and I was defined by each one of those years."

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Seventh Star

2007 IS THEIR YEAR

BY ROBERT HOUSTON

IT'S BEEN NEARLY NINE YEARS SINCE THE FORMATION OF SEVENTH STAR, AND AFTER ONE EP, TWO FULL-LENGTHS, AND NUMEROUS U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL TOURS, IT HAS FINALLY ARRIVED: 2007, THE YEAR OF SEVENTH STAR.

2005 saw the release of *Brood of Vipers*, which took Seventh Star to the next level professionally, musically, and lyrically. With a dedicated lineup, ferocious frontman, and sweat-soaked, energy-filled live performances, they poured everything they had into the band. Two years later and wiser, Seventh Star is back with *The Undisputed Truth*.

In March, Seventh Star will head back to Salem, MA to GodCity Studios to work with Kurt Ballou (the man responsible for recording *Brood...* as well as such greats as Converge, Ramallah, Cave In, and many more), so you can be sure to expect another in-your-face recording.

With the same lineup of Johnny Intravaia, Drew Russ, Shawn Douglas and Chase Moore, Seventh Star has written their most focused and diverse record yet. Taking over six months off from touring to write, the boys are pulling out all the stops and drawing from their full range of influences from hardcore, thrash and anything aggressive. The result is a Seventh Star who are upping the speed and attitude in the style of metal bands like Obituary or Sepultura, adding the bounce of NYHC bands a la Madball and Biohazard, and bringing in southern groove in the vein of Crowbar and C.O.C., as well as parts drawn from post-hardcore and rock, with overall better songwriting. For their upcoming album, Seventh Star has created some of their most memorable songs yet.

Lyrically, *The Undisputed Truth* will make no compromises. The album's theme is the restoration of creation. Exploring the need for answers and purpose. Bold lyrics with a point.

In a scene where bands hop from trend to trend, and where making records has been turned to "units" and "scans," Seventh Star stand as a band with a message. Their music has purpose. Their purpose gives birth to music. And their purpose restores the creation who yearns for its Creator.

2007: THE YEAR OF SEVENTH STAR

This is what is written on Seventh Star's myspace. When I read what the theme was for this album, I cried. This is the year for the restoration for all creation to go back and even beyond the Garden of Eden. I had a chance to talk to Drew Russ about their new album, entitled *The Undisputed Truth*.

Robert: So I'm here with Drew Russ from Seventh Star. And this is the year of the seventh star – is that correct Drew?
Drew: Yes, it is. We put that up first because it's 2007 and we thought we would run with that. But I just wrote a song about it around the theme of the year seven, and seven being God's number. That the kingdom of God is at hand, which the general theme of the album is. That is what we are going for.

Awesome, and when does the record come out?
It is coming out June 12th.

Why not 7-7-07?
Well, it's not a Tuesday and all releases have to be on a Tuesday.

That's true.
That would be awesome. Maybe we'll do a limited edition shirt on that day or something.

So, you recorded again with Kurt from Converge, and went to Boston, Massachusetts...
Actually, Salem, Mass...

So, what is the concept for this album?
I would not say it's a concept, per say, because we never sat down to plan it out as a concept album. Not every song is on the same subject, but it does have the same theme. Johnny and I were sitting down and talking about the lyrics of the whole restoration of creation. When man fell, all of creation fell; and how God had a plan to set that back and restore it. It's about how everyone yearns for something more and not everyone knows what that is. But deep

Photos: Brian Fahey

down they know they were created for something more. That's why so many people at some point in their life ... they become part of a cause. And it stems from the fact that every human heart has a need for God.

What you are saying about the album brings to mind the scripture in Acts 17 (22-34 NKJV), where Paul talks to the Athenians and says, "You worship an unknown God, but this is who He is..."
Yeah, I guess you could also go to John 1:1, where it says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That verse is great in English, but if you strip it down and look at who it was talking to... All the other Gospels were written to the Jews (God's chosen) and this was written to the Romans (the Gentlies); and was telling them about theosis and logos. To them that meant the things that ran the universe, he was also saying that God was the universe in a roughly translated sense. That God is in all of us. God is in our DNA. We all have a desire for God, because it's the order in which the earth runs. I hope that makes sense.

Yeah, yeah...
I'm just saying that all of creation yearns for its Creator. The whole Bible points to it. I think we try to present in a way where everyone sees it and says, "Yes, there is something wrong with the world.

The answer we are pointing to is Christ.
Yeah, of course. That is how He redeemed all the human race – is through Christ.

So, this is your fourth record. Also the third record on Facedown, and second record with Mister Johnny. How was the recording with Johnny and Chase this time around?
The recording came out awesome. We went back to Kurt again, because we were comfortable with him. He knew what we were going for and we were way more prepared for this album. We took more time off. We got every little thing done before we got up there to record this album. Chase laid down guitars much quicker, Johnny's voice is so much stronger. We were way more prepared and things were way more thought out, and we put a lot more thought before we went to record this time around and it helped make the new record sound bigger than the last one.

Yeah, well for me, *Brood of Vipers* ... I think that is the best album you guys have ever put out. I think it was the best album on Facedown that year.
Thanks a lot, man. We were really happy with how *Brood...* came out. I was not (displeased) with the new album, but I always said I wanted to write a new album when I hated the one we had out – to write a new one, so we don't repeat ourselves. When we started writing I was all, "AAH, I still like *Brood...* a lot," but I love recording. But now that the new one is done – *The Undisputed Truth* – I can see the things we improved upon. The songs don't drag as much, they are catchier then *Brood...* The lyrics make a lot more sense. There was a actually a theme this time around, and we were way more prepared.

The theme I got from *Brood of Vipers* was not necessarily an attack on the American Christian. But more of a wake up call... "This is who you are..."
Exactly, exactly. We were trying to point out the hypocrisy in things. With *Brood of Vipers* we were addressing the issues of "there are broken people in this world. And we know that people hate God, because of Christians that had set bad examples and we are some of those." We were pointing out that people are not the true reflection of God, and we all have to look to Jesus through God for that. That is what we were going for in *Brood...* But *The Undisputed Truth* is a natural progression from that. Agreeing that things are not right and people can identify with that. Now that we have identified it, what does that point to? What is real in this world? Why do you feel there is something wrong? There is something so right – God is perfect. It just happened naturally. Johnny had some great ideas and it came out great.

My recording device ended there, but I thanked Drew for taking the time to do the interview and talked about the tour they were on with Since the Flood...

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Nodes Of Ran
DEFINE THIS

BY DAVID STAGG

"Could you spell that out for me?"

It's not long before he's looking for backup, scrolling through his phone, hoping the surname I'm asking about is in there.

"It's uh… Oh man…" He starts laughing. "I have Beneky in here, but I think it's spelled wrong: B-E-N-E-K-Y. I don't think that's right."

Jon Parker, guitarist for the metal band Nodes of Ranvier, is having trouble remembering how to spell the last name of their new singer, Kyle Benecke (spelled correctly). He was hoping the new Pocket PC phone he got two days ago would have the full name in there, but as it turns out, he must have put it in there rapidly and incorrectly, off the top of his head, and is still learning how to do everything on the new phone.

The band that Parker plays in, Nodes of Ranvier, is also perpetually learning how to do new things as well, and with the number of people that have come and gone from their band, he's going to have a headache figuring out how to spell everyone's name he knows in his new cell's phone book. They've had roughly one million people in the band at different dots on their timeline, and adding aforementioned Benecke as vocalist is the newest. "There have been 15 different people in this band," Parker says. "We've never had the same line-up on two records, which is not the way I planned it. It's a blessing to still be able to perform and do things, especially to this caliber."

"A lot of bands can't withstand that kind of pressure, either" I say.

"I can definitely see why," Parker says. "With us, it's always been we've worked really hard for everything that's come to us, and it's made us really thankful and grateful for everything that's come our way. It's easy to lose sight and forget that this is still fun, that this is enjoyable for us. People come and go, and that's a shame, but we're fortunate enough that in this town, there is a large enough pool of musicians to draw from."

The town he's referring to is Sioux Falls, South Dakota where Nodes of Ranvier was conceived. It's in the Southeast corner of the rectangular state, right next to Minnesota and Iowa, and is home to about 150-grand strong. It's here that Parker grew up—and fortunately enough, where their new label, Victory Records, wanted Nodes to record the follow-up album to 2005's *The Years to Come*. Now, when Parker has to show up to the studio, he can just drive down the same streets he always did when he learned to drive in the first place.

The record he's driving to the studio to make these days is Nodes of Ranvier's second full-length album, behind their self-titled release from 2003. And with Parker, the new addition of Benecke, along with guitarist Jake Stefek, bassist Brady Murphy ("Yes, he's Irish," Parker says), and drummer Josh Ferrie, the bar keeps pushing higher.

"We just laid down some vocal tracks with (Benecke) last weekend, for the first time," Parker explains about the record. "It was just a stressful period, trying to find a singer and make a record at the same time, because last time we worked with the singer as we were writing. This time, we wrote this record with four musicians, without a vocalist. It was Kyle's job to get the pre-production, listen to it, and write lyrics. He did a beautiful job."

The band is ridiculously excited to have him in the line-up. Everyone that meets the guy, says Parker, geeks out over the fact that the band managed to score him as a singer. With him in the mix, Nodes of Ranvier's next release, *Defined By Struggle,* promises to be, in their minds, leaps in the right direction.

"I think most people are kind of expecting us to go the way of marketability or whatever," Parker explains, "but this record—I think we managed to scare up some of our thrash roots. It's kind of a throwback to what we enjoyed listening to growing up." Think blast beats, even. He

says: "It's heavy."

"We find (*Defined By Struggle*) to be a very fitting term for the record," Parker continues as he laughs through his Northern accent. At this point, I begin to ask him about the name of the record, the record in general, what inspired it, how the writing was, hoping for him to latch on to something that would spawn more in-depth questions and answers, but as soon as I asked, he took the reins, and in quick sentences, spoken from the heart, he said this:

"The record is a very positive outlook on what it means to persevere through—obviously it's something we've dealt with many, many times over. The way (Benecke's) writing metaphorically is really, really interesting. There's a new song on the record, called 'Archegos.' He's a guy that sat at the bottom of a ship, and if the ship would get stuck in high waters, this guy was a strong swimmer and would swim to shore. He would hold the line so that all the people on the boat would then follow, so no one would die. The Archegos is a metaphor for God. We've always stood—in our place in the music world—that we believe in our band first, and our personal religion second; but what we're doing on this record is putting lyrics out there that have meaning both in spiritual terms and more everyday life terms. We're using examples of things that unless you're an idiot, you're going to be able to understand. That we're writing about spiritual life and faith. It comes across in a way that's very open-ended."

He wasn't done.

"We don't want to be looked at as a ministry, we want to be looked at as a band first," Parker says. "People always ask you questions from different perspectives; people ask, 'Hey, are you a Christian band?' like eagerly awaiting your answer to be, 'Yes, we are!' and at the same time, (you get the same question) from people awaiting your answer to be no you're not. You sense it coming. We like to play it from both sides of the fence. It's equally as ridiculous to expect a band to be or not to be what you want them to be, what you think about faith or what you don't think about faith."

But more importantly, to the band, faith, spirituality, and beliefs aside, they do want to be good role models, and friends to people at their shows. "We want to give to other people and inspire younger kids to be in bands," Parker says. "We want to identify with the fans. We don't want to be a band for show. We want to go out and have fun with the kids and make friends. It's one of the hardest things in the world to sign an autograph, and I think most of the guys in the band would say the same thing. You're not up there to impress people, you know, at least not for us. We're up there to connect, and to give back what the bands came before us gave us."

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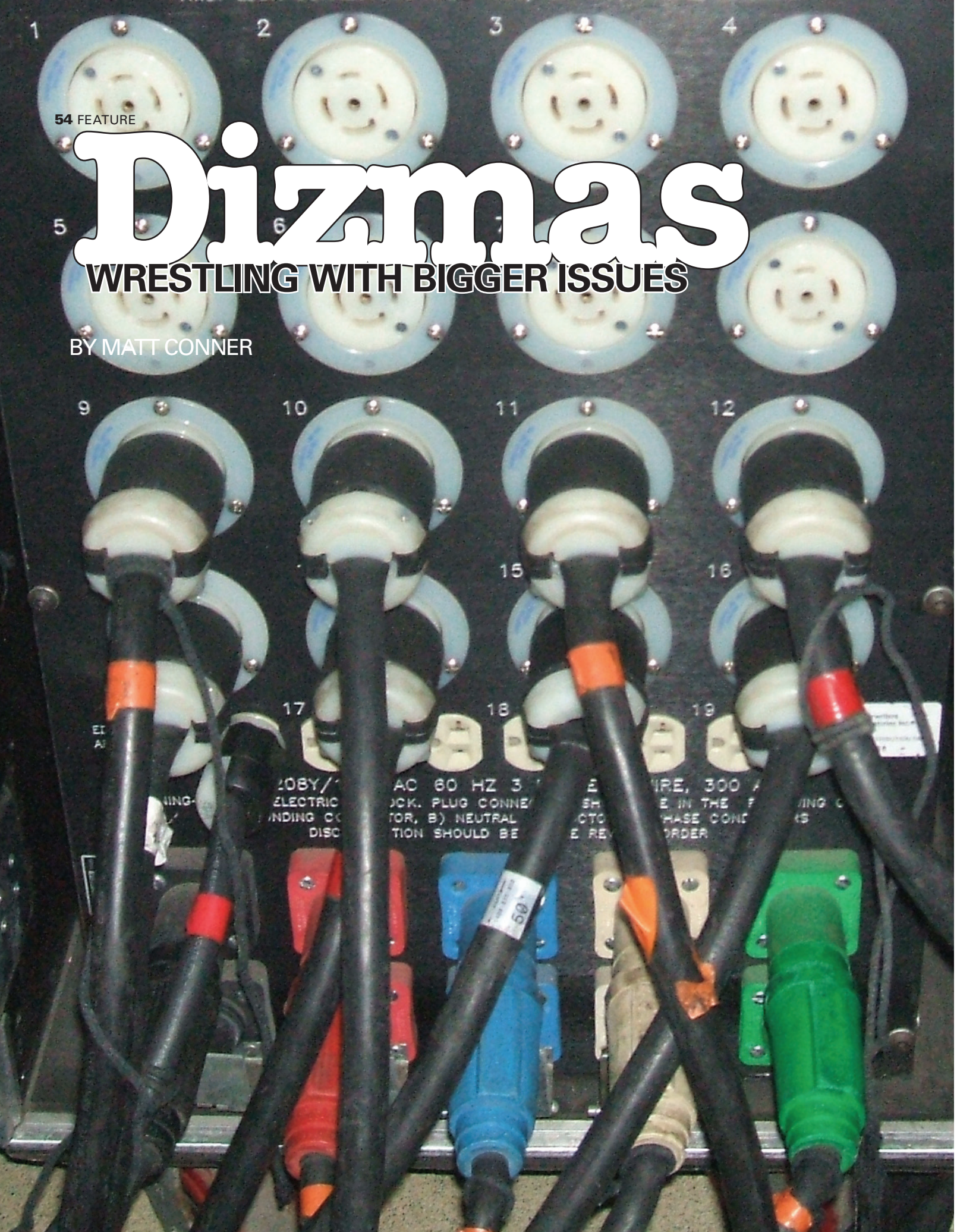
Dizmas

WRESTLING WITH BIGGER ISSUES

BY MATT CONNER



Find yourself conflicted? Welcome to the world of the Dizmas. Whether wrestling with an appropriate reaction to personal tragedies or figuring out their place in the modern rock scene, tension is the key word – so much so, they decided to name their sophomore album after it.

After debuting with *On A Search In America,* the SoCal rockers toured relentlessly for the next two years alongside Kutless, Flyleaf, Pillar and others. The result was a tired band wrestling with bigger issues about family, music and the drive to keep going.

"Over the last two years, we've been touring and spending a lot of time on the road away from those we love," says drummer Clay Hunt. "We've been learning the tension that it puts on relationships among family and friends and significant others and also within the band."

Enter the aforementioned *Tension*, literally and figuratively. As the quintet dealt with issues stirring inside of them, then Dizmas found healing, answers and even God within the conflict.

"A lot of the songs on the album deal with various tensions and are about life in general," notes Hunt. "One of them is 'October' and was written about my cousin, who actually died of a drug overdose this past October. It's a song written about the choices that were made to lead him into that. We have other songs, like 'If You Love Someone' that's about the process in life of trying to let go of things and having to know that it's just a part of life."

Vocalist Zach Zegan agrees. "The thing that's cool about the title of the record is that it's something that is relevant and appropriate for everyday life in anyone's life. We always are placed in situations of tension. Should I make this decision or this one? And if I make this decision, is it the right one or the wrong one? It can be as simple as whether you should get a haircut this week or not to whether you should marry this person. Or take it into our sin nature. It's that tension between trying to avoid falling into sin but at the same time, desiring to do that. There's a tension in so many areas of life."

"One thing we discussed through this is that tension is also the place where Christ is. That's where the cross is," Zach continues. "It fills that tension, that void between what is right and what is wrong. A lot of times when we are here on earth and trying to figure out what to do, we find God is not as concerned with right or wrong as He is with how you are going to grow through that tension and that struggle of making the right decision. It's not so much about the outcome as much as the pathway to get to the end."

But that place of confusion is not always easy. For Hunt, it was hard enough to deal with the death of a family member, but figuring out how to express that grief artistically is another tension in itself.

"It was tough, obviously," explains Hunt. "It's one of those things where, as an artist, having to be transparent and having to put yourself out there is what you want to present to the world. But at the same time, it's one of those things where you feel exposed. You're saying that you deal with this stuff, too. It's coming out there and being open and naked to everybody. You're dealing with something huge and everybody is able to see me for who I am."

"However, it can also be very freeing," he continues. "It's something I know that people deal with every day and I hope, in hearing it, that it can give hope to someone who might be dealing with it or might speak to another person who was on my end who has to watch this sort of thing unfold. I hope it can give hope and comfort that things can get better. That you can get through this and something is bigger out there to get you through that."

But for Dizmas, the ability to be real with their fans is a vital part of who they are called to be. "When you're able to put yourself out there, whether it's lyrically or musically, it's definitely one of those things where you let that release happen and it's a healing thing," says Hunt. "It's pretty amazing that you get the opportunity through what you do to be able to share that with other people and let them come alongside you. They can connect on a deeper level."

"It's not just artist to a person receiving the art. It's people being in this together. It's person to person without any pretense to it. It definitely is freeing. When you're at a show and people hear the story, there is no pretense there. You're a broken person, who has been dealing with something, talking to another person who might also be broken and dealing with something. It's an amazing opportunity to do that."

For the construction of their artwork, Dizmas turned to a new producer in Steve Wilson (Jonezetta, Hawk Nelson). The change brought about a vitality and energy much needed after such a long time on the road marked by questions and tragedy.

"It was exciting and adventurous to bring in a new viewpoint, start from scratch on that side of things and see where that would take us," says Zach Zegan. "The thing that's been exciting most of all on this one is that Steve is in a band and is a fellow musician. He's a guy who really taught us a lot and opened our eyes to the complexity of a song. But at the same time, we would overthink things in our writing. So Steve would help us to hone in on our strengths. That was a cool thing to be a part of. When Steve came in, it was totally fresh, totally new. It was exciting to see somebody else's viewpoint on our music."

"I think also, to Steve's credit, he brought out our influences. When we did our last record, it was one of those things where we would say, 'On this part of this song, we should embrace the Blindside vibe here.' Then your whole record becomes this diverse thing. It can be good. It can make for your own sound. But it can also make for a record that's all over the place. One thing that Steve really did with us is to say, 'No, we're not gonna pull from Blindside here and Jimmy Eat World here.' He just asked who were the two or three bands that we loved. It helped us narrow down, as five individuals who have completely different tastes in music at times, and brought us to a place of unity."

Ultimately, the biggest tension for the band lies with the reception to their music. "It's scary, because it's one of those things where we understand that it's a new sound," says Zegan. "We may turn some heads away from us, but we also hope it will turn a lot of people toward us. We hope it will change perspective and thoughts on who we are and what we do. We are excited to share the new music, because we like it, but you're always concerned wondering, 'Will they like it?'"

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MxPx

THE TOOTH & NAIL TIME MACHINE

BY DAN MACINTOSH

YOU MIGHT SAY MXPX HAS EXPERIENCED A KIND OF HOMECOMING WITH ITS NEW *SECRET WEAPON* RELEASE. TO CREATE IT, THE BAND HOOKED UP WITH A FEW FAMILIAR FACES FROM ITS EARLY DAYS.

After ending its deal with SideOneDummy, the band has once again recorded with Tooth & Nail, which – you may recall – gave the group its start with a 1995 album called *Pokinatcha*. But, as late night TV pitchmen are so fond of saying, that's not all. Not only did this Washington-based band reunite with its initial Washington-based record label; the group also brought producer Aaron Sprinkle aboard again, too. And just as MxPx has grown and broadened its appeal over the past decade or so, Sprinkle has also expanded his professional resume considerably. He's since worked with such "it" bands as Emery and The Almost, to name but a few, in the meantime.

"It feels like we've been sort of transported back in time," says Herrera of MxPx's current déjà vu feelings. "And we've got the whole world ahead of us and our whole lives ahead of us. And anything can happen, anything's possible." This statement finds Herrera looking forward with sincere, limitless hope, as though it was 1995 all over again.

No band lasts over a decade without first learning a few basic life lessons. One such common sense rule for a healthy existence is to never burn relational bridges. This trio, which has hit the big time with hits like "Chick Magnet" and "Punk Rawk Show" never become too big for its britches, which is precisely why bridges back to its past remain intact.

"In all aspects of this record we've kind of come back to our old childhood friends and we're bringing to the table what we've learned in life over these last 10 years," says Herrera. When trying to put this state of being, if you will, into a workable analogy, Herrera struggles to place it in scholastic terms. "We've all gone to rock & roll college and all the different facets of, I guess, the rock & roll university or whatever."

Secret Weapon is an excellent album, which stands up well next to the band's extensive back catalogue. But that's easy for me to say; I'm not as close to the album as the band is. It's far more difficult for groups to have a clear perspective on their work, especially when a recording is still so fresh and new. "I feel like it's a strong album," says Herrera. "It's always hard to tell because right when you make a record, it's always exciting. It's always, like, 'Oh man, I love this stuff! It's the best thing we've ever done, and I don't know how we're going to top it.' I've got a little bit of that. Obviously, we're doing press and we're trying to promote this record. On the other hand, I really feel like it is going to hold up over time. Not only is it simple, but it's got a lot of what modern music is leaning towards: more technical guitars, tons of vocals. I mean, we've always had tons of vocals and harmonies and stuff like that. But I think it's somehow succeeded – hopefully, time will tell and the listeners will tell – and it's got everything everybody's loved about MxPx. All the punk rock simplicity to it, but it (also) holds up in 2007 and seems like a relevant piece of music."

Let's face it: playing together for many years without repeating oneself is a daunting task, to say the least. Furthermore, keeping music fresh and vital becomes harder as creative patterns begin to solidify over time. Herrera is not beyond admitting that perhaps a little stagnation as crept into some of MxPx's more recent offerings. "I admit that some of the stuff that we have done over the last five years maybe is tired to some people," Herrera confesses. "So we really didn't want to do that anymore. We wanted to make everything count for this record."

One factor that gives *Secret Weapon* a fresher feel is its voluminous influx of special guests. These star players include Bad Religion's Brian Baker (who adds his lead guitar skills to the title cut) and Good Charlotte's Benji Madden, who sings on "Tightly Wound." Other studio visitors included Sugarcult's Tim Pagnotta and former Superdrag leader

John Davis. Davis' participation, at least on paper, seems like an especially odd match. After all, Davis is best known for his beatific power-pop, whereas MxPx made its reputation on high-powered punk rock.

"We've been huge fans of Superdrag for years, pretty much since their first record." Herrera explains. "I've seen them I don't know how many times live. They used to come to Seattle a lot and play The Crocodile or whatever. We met John at one of the shows and talked to him. And he, like, totally knew about our band and stuff. So we were just kind of, like, acquaintances and we hadn't really seen him much since then. This was years ago. But still, every time they put out a record, I'd go buy it. We really became huge fans of Superdrag after we heard their second album, *Head Trip In Every Key*. Jerry Finn produced that and mixed it and that was right before we worked with Jerry Finn. We were kind of listening to a lot of what he's done."

Returning to Tooth & Nail and reconnecting with Aaron Sprinkle also helped MxPx hook up with Davis. "Now that he's been doing some stuff on a couple of Tooth & Nail Records, so he (Davis) knows Aaron Sprinkle, we were, like, 'We should totally get John to do something.' So it was too easy," Herrera recalls. "I didn't actually talk to him; it was all Aaron. He was just, like, 'I'll call him and have him do it.'"

"Sad Sad Song," the track Davis contributes to, particularly reveals MxPx's softer tonal persona. Gentle is not always the band's most familiar musical trait, but it's certainly one of its best sides. "Yeah, it's true, we have 'Chick Magnet' and we have a couple other songs," Herrera says, recalling the group's more mellow inclinations. "But usually, it's all fairly loud – especially when we play live." Herrera views MxPx as two different bands at times: its live persona and its studio self. "We're definitely a much harder band (live) than people would expect us to be from hearing our records. A lot of those records … they are what they are … but they definitely don't showcase my voice quite like I sing live. On this whole record in general, I really wanted to sing out a little bit more like I do live. And, of course, there's songs like 'Sad Sad Song,' that's the other direction. A little bit more, 'let's just have fun with this and produce it and make it sound amazing.'"

With respect to the CD title, what exactly is MxPx's secret weapon? "On a band level, it could be seen as: This is our weapon. We're coming back. We're back. We've got a new record. And this is gonna takes us to the next step."

Paradoxically, MxPx had to take a few steps back into its past, in order to take its next leap forward, which is just one of the many secret weapons in this veteran band's longstanding success.

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Michael Knott

A "WHERE ARE THEY NOW?" VIGNETTE

BY STEVE RUFF

MICHAEL KNOTT HAS BEEN LABELED MANY THINGS. YOU NAME IT AND IT HAS BEEN PLACED ON HIM. A REBEL, OUTSIDER, CONTROVERSIAL, DIFFICULT. MICHAEL KNOTT IS A PIONEER WHO CUT A PATH THROUGH THE INDUSTRY AND PAVED THE WAY FOR MANY OF THE BANDS TODAY. I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO CATCH UP WITH HIM ON A MONDAY NIGHT AND ASK HIM A FEW QUESTIONS, NOT AS A JOURNALIST, BUT AS A FAN.

Michael has been at the front of a myriad of bands. Perhaps best known for his band LSU, he has also fronted Aunt Betty's, Strung Guru's, Bomb Bay Babies, Lifesavers, Cush and recorded many a solo album that never seem to lack in intensity, creativity and soul wrenching honesty. When Michael first began his career in the Christian music industry it was a different time. It was the 80's and rock music was called the work of the devil. The world of Christendom has always had its scapegoats, back then it was dancing and rock music. Christian music was safe and happy and the lyrics didn't touch on the real issues of the human experience. The labels were scared of it and the people didn't want to hear it. I remember, because those were the years that I was growing up. A lot has changed in 25 years. What is mainstream today was frowned upon back then. There were a handful of bands that were the pioneers of the scene today. Without LSU/Michael Knott, The 77's, Adam Again, DA, The Choir and The Violet Burning there wouldn't be the scene that there is today. Michael Knott led the pack with a mix of alternative music that had punk roots and lyrics that spoke to the heart that knew this world was hard and sometimes unfair and difficult, but it had to be dealt with honestly and ultimately there is a God that is there for us when we come to Him.

I asked Michael how he had seen the music scene change over the last 25 years. "All these bands that you mention were doing this music that wasn't really accepted, and then over time it became accepted, but the labels were afraid (to) really take it on. Now, the entire community has embraced music that is in this genre and I think that it's a good thing. This type of music is now the mainstream, but back then it wasn't at all. The whole alternative worship that has really grown in the last 10 years is wonderful. There wasn't anything like that back then. You know, when I jumped off a planter on stage at a church we would get banned from playing again, and that would kill the gigs we had lined up for the next six months. A lot of us put the punk rock and alternative style into the music and it just wasn't embraced at that time. The pioneers get ostracized a lot, and that's just how it goes."

Michael's impact has been felt in many ways. When asked about what kind of impact he has left on the scene I think it would have to be through the lyrics as much as the music itself. Michael has never skirted controversy – whether it is the style of music or through the issues that he takes on directly in the lyrics. "Well, I constantly still get letters from people all over the world who have been influenced by my music from years back as well as recently. The *Shaded Pain* album came out at a time in Christendom when the attitude was that you're just supposed to be happy, and that's really not the truth. You can deal with things with the Lord, and through other influences, but at that time if you had a problem or didn't feel good, you weren't allowed to say that you didn't feel good. When *Shaded Pain* came out I was singing about having pain and not having to 'shade' it… admit it, why do we have to hide it? When we admit these things and work through these issues with others, that is the way that we deal with it and I think that's what's happening today, and I think it's great. Still, back then, when I came out with that record we didn't get another show for two or three years. It's more balanced now with bands who are dealing more with the human experience, but in those days it wasn't as real in the industry."

So, that brings us to today. In an industry flooded with bands that all fit in the same genre and pump out album after album that all run in the same vein, Michael is creatively mixing it up and putting out music that is still genuinely different. I asked him where his music fit in with the scene of today. "Still pretty much on the outside. Music is my life. I write everyday and sometimes you may think that you might run out of ideas, but I don't, because everyday I have a different experience every time that I wake up. You know, some artists – not all, but some – make a million dollars and can't write another song. I think that's because they become wealthy and don't have to deal with what the rest of us have to deal with. Fortunately, I haven't made a million dollars, so I can still write (laughter). On my new EP, *The All Indie* EP, I go from the song 'All Fall Down,' which is about a girl who drinks too much, and she's beautiful, and she's falling down all the time; to the song 'All You Can Do,' which is about communion, it's about receiving Christ in your heart and that's all you can do to get through this world. I don't mean to mix it up like that, but I do. All my albums come down to the one focal point, and that's Christ as Lord and Savior … that's the main thing. Sometimes the songs are blunt, and sometimes they're not, and that's okay. Where do I fit in in this industry, though? I don't think that I do that much, but I think that if people gave my stuff a chance, they could see the connection with the Lord. Maybe I'm still a bit of a rebel in my old age (laughter).

Michael is still hard at work on many projects. He's a musician as well as an artist/painter and the new material is coming out soon, probably by the time you read this. One of Mike's new bands is Struck Last May, and it is as unique and different as anything that he's ever done. Mike's friend and collaborator, Rick McDonough, are the members and Michael explains it as this: "Rick's really into sounds and samples and that is what he brought into this project. I've never really used the samples, but I love them. It's a really cool record. It's like *Sesame Street* meets *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It's different from anything that I've ever done and the album's been about three years in the making." You can check out two songs from the album on Struck Last May's myspace page. Rick handles the programming, samples, guitars and vocals, and Michael dishes out the vocals, guitars, arrangement and lyrics. The CD will also be a fully packaged album. Mike's not using his artwork on this CD, but all of the pictures used will be featured at the Art Loft Gallery, an art gallery that Mike is opening with his sister in Southern California. The opening for the gallery is June 9th, but you can check them out now at artloft205.com.

As far as a reunion with Aunt Betty's or another LSU album? "No plans with Aunt Betty's," Michael says, "but there will be another LSU album in the next year and it will be the heaviest LSU album that I've ever done. I've got the whole thing figured out and it will be heavy." In addition to LSU, Mike is also doing a CD with his dad and one of their friends. The LSU album *Dogfish Jones* had two songs that Michael's dad wrote and sang on, and this new album will be Michael's dad writing most of the songs. They will play some dates behind the project as well as put out an album. Check out the website theroversthree.com for more information,

or, as always, you can go to Michael's website, michaelknott.com and get all the info, updates and purchase his vast collection of recordings. You can view his artwork at Gerard artwork.com and as a painter he is constantly creating new pieces as well as additions to some already existing series that are drawn from his inspiration with the human experience.

The last thing that I asked Michael was if there was anything that he wanted to share? He said, "I know there is a lot of music out there for people to purchase and to find out about. I've been out of the scene for awhile, but I'm back. Check out the other artists that have been around for awhile, for a long time, because we are still creating. The creativity doesn't really change; it's still there, so give it a chance and check it out."

Michael is one of the busiest men in the industry. He's a painter, father, musician, writer and curator at a new gallery. For longtime fans the new projects will be sure to please, but if you have never checked out his work, check it out now! Michael is truly a visionary in the scene and what he delivers is always unique and original. Again, check out michaelknott.com, artloft205.com, myspace.com/strucklastmay, theroversthree.com, and per Michael's request, salonme.net.

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Sinead O'Connor

BEYOND IMAGERY

BY DAN MACINTOSH

THOSE WHO ONLY ASSOCIATE SINEAD O'CONNOR WITH RIPPING UP A PICTURE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II ON *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*, MIGHT BE A LITTLE SURPRISED BY THE INTENTLY SPIRITUAL FOCUS OF HER CURRENT MUSIC. AFTER ALL, ISN'T DESTROYING THIS BELOVED CATHOLIC LEADER'S IMAGE AN OVERTLY ANTI-RELIGIOUS STATEMENT? BUT O'CONNOR'S 1987 DEBUT ALBUM TITLE, *THE LION AND THE COBRA*, WAS INSPIRED BY PSALM 91, AND SHE'S ALSO CONSISTENTLY SPRINKLED SPIRITUAL MATERIAL THROUGHOUT HER RECORDED OUTPUT SINCE THEN. SO MIXING FAITH WITH MUSIC IS NOTHING NEW FOR O'CONNOR.

Although her back catalogue reveals this spiritual undercurrent, the Irish singer/songwriter's bluntly titled new *Theology* release is by far her strongest religious statement to date. This music, which is primarily drawn from Old Testament texts, is also some of the most peaceful music of O'Connor's many times tumultuous career. "I suppose it was my intention deliberately to choose things from the scriptures that were peaceful," O'Connor explains. "Part of the reason why I wanted to make this record – and there are a load of reasons – but part of it was that I look around the world and see a lot of damage being done in the name of various different theologies, various different scriptures. And I'm interested in contradicting that, if you like, and so my kind of reason for being with this record was to go into scriptures and find the parts that contradict anyone who says the God character is okay with violence."

O'Connor may be a deeply religious person, but don't expect to see her trading favorite Bible verses with *700 Club* host Pat Robertson anytime soon. This is because Christianity is just one part of O'Connor's theology. "By birth and by culture, I'm a Catholic," she explains. "And I would see myself as being a Catholic who has also many other influences. I'm extremely influenced by Judaism. I'm also extremely influenced by Rastafari, which is a form of what you call Judeo-Christianity. I would identify with many different religions or sets of scriptures – put it that way. Equally, I identify with the Hindus or Sufis. I like them, although I'm not a Muslim. In terms of American Christians, there are things there that I would identify with. And then there might be things I don't identify with. Same as in Judaism; there are things I identify with and things I don't. Or even in my own religion, which is Catholicism; there are things I identify with and things I don't identify with. Same with Rastafari; there are things I identify with and things I don't."

O'Connor zeroes in so intently on the Old Testament with these new songs for a number of reasons, which range from her need to better understand why Jesus came into the world, to – of all things – a deep love for the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. "Part of my desire to understand the New Testament was that I came to realize I would have to go back and understand the Old," she explains. "In order to understand the New, you've got to understand what went on before. It was part of my trying to understand the New Testament, which led me to the Old Testament. I just fell in love with it. It's a bit like songs. I'm in love with a particular Curtis Mayfield song at the moment and I can't listen to anything else because of it. It was like that with the Old Testament – that I just fell so in love with it that I haven't even got 'round to the New Testament yet, because I'm not finished with the Old one yet."

"On another level, we all know the Jesus story really well," she continues. "We're all very, very familiar with the Jesus story. So we all know the New Testament quite well, really; the basic gist of what went on. The problem is that we don't understand it. At least in my culture. They tell us the stories, but we don't really understand what they mean. And I really do think that, in order to understand why Jesus was important, you have to know what went on before."

"As a child I got interested in these scriptures in the first place, because the culture I was growing up in was a very religious culture; the country was run by it, so I was interested in studying it. There was (also) a whole experience I had with *Fiddler on the Roof*. That just blew me away! The Tevye character and the whole theology of that and the way he conducted his relationship through singing – the relationship he had with God he conducted through singing. From being interested in things like that and listening to what the Tevye character was saying, that made me get interested in the Old Testament also."

In her unique way, O'Connor believes she comprehends Jesus. "I am someone who can afford to get stuck in the Old Testament, because I actually do get the Jesus thing; if you know what I mean," she states. "By which I mean, I don't know whether Jesus ever lived as a living man or not, but I almost don't need to know whether that's true or not because I really do really get the magic, which is Jesus. I know there is something out there, which you can call upon and it responds to you."

It's not uncommon to hear stories about people raised with spiritual things who later wander away from those teachings, only to return to them again during adulthood. But O'Connor's story doesn't exactly follow that familiar flip-flopping journey. "In my case I don't think it's true that I ever left it," she says. "I think it was always there. But the fact is that I was into rock & roll. I was young as well, and to some extent the rock & roll arena doesn't really want to know about spiritual things – let's face it. Secondly, I actually think you have to have a certain age on you in order to be able to handle this kind of material; in order to be able to do what I would have wanted to do with the material, creatively speaking. I think you have to have grown through your natural anger or your natural anxieties or your unsure-ness of yourself. I think you have to have an emotional maturity as well as spiritual maturity in order to take on a project like this. I actually never left my spirituality behind; it would have governed pretty much everything I was doing. It's just that I wasn't talking about it. My records weren't overtly talking about it, but they were subtly dealing with it."

Growing up, O'Connor was strongly inspired by Bob Dylan's *Slow Train Coming* album. Some critics have called this career move commercial suicide on Dylan's part. However, O'Connor is not worried about getting these same negative reactions (in terms of sales, at least) that Dylan received. O'Connor is no stranger to controversy and rejection, after all, and she now has highly developed thick skin. "No, I'm not concerned about that; otherwise I wouldn't have made the record," she counters. "I personally spent a half a million quid of my own money to make this record. And I would have been happy to give it away for nothing. I'm not someone who is concerned about what people say, or do, or think about me. I've been in this music business 24 years dealing with everyone having an opinion this way or that way, so I've learned not to take it onboard, good or bad."

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Photo: Kevin Abosch

Derek Webb
CONVERSANT 'CONTROVERSIALIST'

...OR, the danger of allowing people to explore the teachings of Jesus, AND think for themselves with guitar in hand.

BY BRIAN QUINCY NEWCOMB

OKAY, I HAVE A DICTIONARY, I KNOW THAT 'CONTROVERSIALIST' IS A WORD. NOW, ANYWAY. BUT WHEN I FIRST SAW IT IN THE BIO FOR DEREK WEBB'S LATEST ALBUM, THE RINGING BELL, I WASN'T SO SURE. THE FIRST CLUE CAME WHEN MY SPELL CHECK DIDN'T UNDERLINE IT IN RED, BUT THERE IT IS DEFINED AS A NOUN, "FOND OF CONTROVERSY; DISPUTATIOUS." IT SURPRISED ME, BUT ONE THING WAS CLEAR: I WAS GOING TO ENJOY THIS INTERVIEW.

What surprised me shaped my first question when Webb called in for our formal chat: "When did it become controversial to be a Christian who sings about peace? Didn't Jesus say 'blessed are the peacemakers' and 'love your enemies'?"

"That's a tremendous question," Webb responded, laughing a little, "but I may not be the guy to ask."

Webb's right. In the current political climate, it appears that many conservative Christians have chosen values making them synonymous with 'the religious Right,' and are seen by many as allied with policies of the Bush administration including the war in Iraq. Thus the contentious Webb pointed out on his last album, *Mockingbird*, that one of the great lies of our time is that "Jesus was a white, middle-class Republican, and if you wanna be saved you have to learn to be like him."

Of course, he told *USA Today* later that Jesus was not a white middleclass Democrat either, but in a world where religious commitments lead to assumptions about political affiliation, Webb is skeptical of party politics.

"A lot of it is a strange confusion in our spiritual identities and our national identities and how some of that has gotten mixed up in American culture," he says. "Especially in a time of war, it feels unpatriotic to entertain a radical idea of peace. If at any point you begin to dissent against the status quo or popular cultural, or political ideas of the day, you seem simultaneously un-Christian, which doesn't make any sense. It's the M.O. of the Christian to be out of step, to be counter-cultural."

A lot of the problem, Webb lays at the feet of Christian leaders who haven't grasped or communicated the teachings of Jesus adequately. "There's a long tradition in the church and beyond it, of making God in our own image," he says. "I think it's really difficult for Westerners who live at this point in history to imagine that Jesus was a first century Jewish man living in the Middle East. He probably looked a lot like Osama Bin Laden, only shorter. There's no historical context for Christianity in America. We don't really understand the Jewish heritage and tradition, which is a huge part of our faith.

"When Jesus is asked what are the most important things that we're commanded to do, what we're supposed to be focusing our time on, I find it interesting that he didn't mention any of the things that I spent most of my adolescent Christian life obsessing over. Which doesn't mean those things aren't valuable at all in leading a Christian life, but they are at best peripheral or secondary to what he did say, which is, to love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. When asked 'who is your neighbor?' He told the story of the Good Samaritan, which equates the neighbor with the person you are least likely to love in this world.

"Jesus said, 'the entire Law and Prophets hang on those two commands,' and yet the majority of the resources, energy and time goes in so many other directions, and not the fulfillment of those two things. Which should give us pause. Is it any wonder, that I see pretty often where I live in downtown Nashville, bumper stickers that say, 'dear Lord, save me from your followers.'"

Although the lyrics remain as serious, but musically *The Ringing Bell* contains some of his most buoyant guitar rock as well as accessible, Beatlesque melodic pop. Webb admits, "Yeah, it was time. On *Mockingbird* the songs were so heavy (conceptually), that it didn't really give people anywhere to go. You kind of had to stare those songs right in the face, on tour we'd play that record straight through start to finish, and it was really heavy. It was a lot to take in; it was exhausting. On this record I wanted a little bit more of a balance, to communicate heavier ideas, and get off topic a bit from my own musical genre, and make it a bit more winsome, with better beats and melodies.

"But the other reason, is that when the songs came out, they came out as rock & roll songs. I can't explain it, but they came out as guitar riffs instead of guitar progressions. Which is just better suited to the electric guitar, so the songs were born wanting to be rock & roll songs."

One of the attractive features in Webb's songs is that he takes into account the full human experience, much as the Psalter does. It's spiritual without denigrating the physical, it seeks to be wholistic and complete. For Webb, that's a conscious effort: "I feel Christian art does a really bad job of accurately speaking to all of life, culture and creation. It's about transcendence in worship and the afterlife. And that's it. Anyone examining the Christian worldview by way of its art will conclude that Christianity is one-dimensional, with nothing to do with modern life.

"I feel we need artists who take their role in kingdom building seriously. We need folk that are willing to make art about 100% of life. That means writing songs about politics and sexuality and the government and families, and everything. Everything, because the Bible gives us a framework to speak about all these things. It's not the fault of the Bible. People would be amazed to learn how relevant it is to modern culture, how it really does speak into the situations we are in. But our artists are not speaking on its behalf, and that's a real problem.

"I wanted early on (in my solo career), after twelve years in Christian music, to try as best I can to locate, identify and dismantle all those filters that I've imposed on my writing. And try to be as purely instinctive as I possibly can and not censor myself before the words even get on the page. That's been my primary job in the last five years. I think the burden of this also falls on the Church, to have a perspective on this that supports art that puts a Biblical perspective on creation and culture. The rule of thumb is, anything that Jesus is Lord of you can write a song about, you can paint a picture of, you can tell a story about. And I believe Jesus is Lord of all things, so that expands the horizons of subject matter."

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Brian "Head" Welch

THE JESUS REVOLUTION

BY DOUG VAN PELT

BACK IN FEBRUARY OF 2005 AN ANNOUNCEMENT WENT OUT TO THE WORLDWIDE PRESS THAT BRIAN "HEAD" WELCH HAD BECOME A BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN AND WAS LEAVING HIS POSITION AS GUITARIST FOR THE MULTI-PLATINUM KORN. IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD BE TALKING AT HIS CHURCH (VALLEY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP) IN BAKERSFIELD, CA. IT WAS AN UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR A CURIOUS AND EAGER AUDIENCE TO HEAR THIS MAN'S TESTIMONY.

"When I quit Korn," Welch explains, "I was hush-hush about it, and no one said anything. Korn was getting ready to do another record deal with another label because we had just gotten off a label, right then. And I felt led to give my testimony at my church, and right before that day came, the pastor told me, 'Are you sure you want to do this? You know, I'm not trying to pressure you to do it.' It was all my idea and stuff, so we set it up. And an idea I had was to go to a local Rock station that played Korn music, and I would tell everyone in Bakersfield if they wanted to hear my testimony, to come into church that day. So I went on the radio and I did the interview and that was that. The next day the church called me, and they said, 'Hey, CNN and MTV, and all these news stations are calling, they want to come film the day of your testimony and stuff, do you want to do that?' I was like, 'What do you mean? I just tried to get some kids in there from Bakersfield.' I thought about it and I was like, 'Whatever, I don't care, I'll do it.'

"So the day came and there were all these kids, they drove up from different states and stuff – Korn fans. I was pretty nervous, you know, because I didn't know what I was going to say. All I knew was that the Lord revealed Himself to me and showed me He was real, and nothing else mattered. I didn't know if I was going to say that, or whatever. But I went in and the pastor there kind of just interviewed me and asked me questions. I just told him that I was addicted to drugs and my life was just, you know … with the fame, and the happiness that came with the rock star life – there was always greater drama or pain that came with that life. You know, if I was getting famous with my band, I would lose my wife. If I was having all of these great shows all over the place, I would be missing my kid at the same time and it was just painful. So that was just it … I just poured out, you know, I cried in front of the people and everything. It was just pretty crazy. Pretty crazy, a lot of people were there."

And thus begins the "new life" (or at least new public life) of one of nu metal's founding band members. His testimony rings "true" in a way that authenticates its reality – with his on again/off again relationship with drugs – showing a struggle with sin even after saying the magic little "sinner's prayer."

He accepted Christ at a young age in his junior high years and then slowly wandered into life with the "heavy metal crowd," getting into music and starting a band that took off like a rocket within a couple years of its formation. While it looked great from the outside, "Pretty much," he admits, "my whole life was just one painful experience after another.

"While I was getting rich and famous, I was losing my soul and losing my emotions, and just being broken. I had gotten married and my marriage fell apart with drugs, physical abuse, and emotional abuse. Me and my wife would beat each other up, make each other bloody every once in a while. She ended up leaving me, and she left our kid, too. I was left to raise my kid, and be in Korn at the same time. So I hired a nanny, tried to do all that, and I fell into drugs worse after a while. For the last two years I was in Korn, I was using meth and pills, and alcohol every single day of my life. I would take the drugs with me to other countries all over the world; I hid them. And some of the countries had the penalty by death if you got caught with drugs and I didn't care, I just like, 'Whatever.'

"I had some friends back in Bakersfield I was doing some real estate business with – they were Christians, and I started reaching out to them and was, like, complaining about my life. I had hidden my drug use from everybody, but I was just complaining about my life. And one day, my real estate broker, a Christian, had sent me an e-mail, and he's like, 'Don't think I'm weird or anything, but I feel like the Lord woke me up at 3:30 this morning and told me to send you this scripture:

'Come to me all who are weary and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest for your soul, for I my yoke is easy and my burden is light…'

"And I was drawn to it and I ended up getting off tour with Korn in the end of 2004. I went and sat down with that guy and I ended up going to church. The pastor was talking about how Jesus is real, and all you gotta do is hang out with Him, seek the kingdom first and all things will be given to you – all the junk will fall away from your life. And I was on drugs when I went to church, because I could not function without them for two years every single day. I did line after line after line of meth… So, at end of the service, he said, 'Anybody want to accept Christ?' And I raised my hand and I said, 'Cool.' And then in my mind, at the time, while I was on drugs, I was like, 'I'm going to go home and do drugs, and if this guy is telling the truth, and Jesus really is alive and He wants to be really personal with me, then all the drugs are going to fall away from me and he's going to give me power.'

"So I went home to my room, poured out the biggest pile of meth, rolled up my hundred-dollar bill, sat on the floor, did a line – my nose was burning. I sat on the floor and said, 'Jesus, if you're real, like that guy said, then take these from me, because I'm going to die if I keep doing this stuff and I want to be a good father to my daughter and she deserves way better. Her mom left us, I'm no good for her, please just become real to me, like that guy said.' And I did another line after I prayed… And a little bit after I prayed that, one of my old friends that I used to do meth with called me. He had heard that I came to the church and raised my hand, so he was calling me to encourage me. And I was like, 'God, You are fast, if this You, that's not a coincidence. My friend who got off meth is calling me, trying to encourage me.'"

That was perhaps the first of many "coincidences" where God showed He was real to Brian. His story is chronicled quite bluntly and raw in his new book from Harper One, *Save Me From Myself*.

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Photo: Josh Vietti

BRIAN "HEAD" WELCH

VERBS

RE-EVALUATING...AND THRIVING

BY BRENTEN GILBERT

When notable members of the community express concerns about the state of hip-hop's music – even to the point of declaring in a hit song that "Hip-Hop is Dead" – it might be time to re-evaluate how you operate within that industry. Couple that with ever-growing stereotypes, bad imaging and continuous negative exposure for a genre that seems determined to put its worst foot forward, and you may be inclined to believe the "hype."

However, Verbs, a former Gotee Records hip-hop artist, has been working in the industry since the late 1990's and offers a broader perspective based on his own experiences and encounters rather than the rumors of the day.

Hip-hop is bigger than the music

"It's almost like people are saying that hip-hop is just the music part of it," explains Verbs, "[when] really you've still got the three other aspects of it." While rap music may be on something of a decline, the community as a whole is thriving. "I think we just fed ourselves with so much commercial hip-hop that over the course of time, [it loses appeal]" says Verbs. "If you only eat broccoli for five months, you are going to get sick of broccoli and start to look for something else."

The world is bigger than the United States

"You can go over to France and Korea and you can go to South Africa or anywhere else and it's like huge communities of B-Boys (break-dancers) all over the place," offers Verbs. "Or go up to Scandinavia and Amsterdam; there is a bunch of graffiti artists." Verbs, whose moniker depicts a life marked by taking action, has traveled a great deal between promoting his music and working with churches and ministerial organizations. It's through these trips that he's gotten "a broader scope of what God is doing across the globe."

In regards to the global influence of hip-hop music, Verb says, "normally [what they're listening to] is the stuff that makes it to the top of the charts." He goes on to note that "the reach and the power that music has makes you be that much more responsible when you are creating music and writing songs." Bearing this in mind, Verbs considers it an honor to be given a platform outside of the US. "It's just amazing what God is doing on a global scale because of its continuity."

The potential is worth the risk

During his ventures to South Africa and around the world, a pattern became clear to Verbs. "A lot of times we are on the road and kids would be inquisitive and ask how to write a song or make the records [sound like that]." Seizing this opportunity in true "action figure" style, Verbs and his crew developed a ministry known as the Train Station.

Says Verbs, "We developed this little program to teach kids between the ages of 12 and 20 how to write and teach them some moves as far as break-dancing, DJ-ing and graffiti art, as well just to try to give them a creative channel. [It's] something to focus on to keep them out of trouble," he continues. "And to see whatever talents they might have that God placed in them that they don't necessarily know about. We try to help bring them out."

For his part, Verbs leads what's known as the Rhyme Lab, a workshop that focuses on showing kids how "to develop a concept or an idea into a song or a verse." Sharing his own skill set, Verbs teaches them a few writing techniques. "I teach them how to find the rhythm of the beat. I teach them about similes and metaphors – how they can use those – and how to take an idea or a theme and break it down and do verses off of that." At the end of the program, the students actually perform the song that they've created. The Train Station extends beyond the rap element of hip-hop culture, however, incorporating separate workshops for B-Boying, graffiti arts, and DJ-ing.

"We assume that they know nothing of any of these art forms," explains Verbs. "So we try to start at ground zero, just kind of familiarize them with the basics. Hopefully from there, they'll go practice and develop it." The goals behind these workshops are pretty basic as well – the thrust of the training is in translating these skills into practical uses. "The main thing is just to get them to see an ability that they have in them that they might not have been challenged to figure out otherwise," says Verbs of the program. "I think a lot of kids are surprised that they even have the ability to do it. [The point is] just to kind of lay that ground work for them and give them something to build on," he further expounds. "Having a finished project helps to kind of pull them into something else."

Verbs recognizes the importance of a solid foundation. Now an independent artist, his current album bears the title, *The Groundwork Theory*, a concept derived from Luke 6 – the parable of two builders. "We need to pay attention to what we are building [our lives and music] on," states Verbs. "And what is really going to be firm enough to continue to build on. Not only that, but we have to allow God to build in us." Truly, a hip-hop culture built on that foundation will never be dead, but will continually thrive.

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BEATS

[hip-hop news 'n' reviews by SphereofHipHop. com]

News shorts…

Stu Dent is working on new music to release down the road. Look for the followup to *Nephilim: Act of God, The Battle For Hebron*, sometime in late 2007 or the early part of 2008. [*Illect.com / Myspace.com/illectrecordings*]

Willie Will's first music video off his debut Beatmart Recordings album, *Reflection*, is available online at Beatmart.com. Reflection dropped in stores on June 5, 2007. [*Beatmart.com*]

Proverb from that **1Way** crew drops *A Common Man's Opus* on us. It is a 10-track album that features collabs from **DJ Morphiziz**, **Jdub** and others. Production support is provided by **Holy Hitmakers**, **Tony P**, **Proverb** and others. [*SphereofhiphopStore.com*]

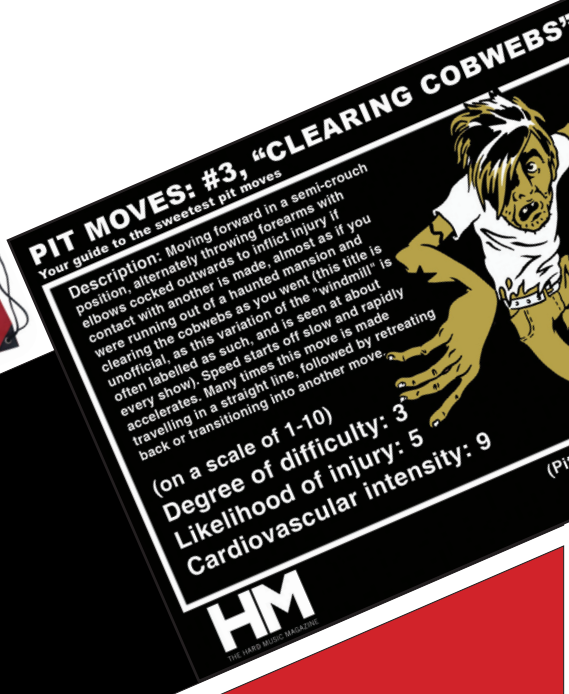
The debut record from upstart Canadian emcee **The Runaway** is here. *A Brief Word* is chock full of engaging and powerful lyrics that are sure to bless, challenge and entertain. Featuring production from **Tony Stone**, **Theory Hazit**, Relic, N.I.F.T.Y. and The Runaway, with guest spots from **Sivion**, N.I.F.T.Y., Shad K, **Titus** and **ILL Seer**. [*Myspace.com/Runawayjc*]

End of Earth Records is announcing the release of the solo debut from legendary producer **Nickels** (Lojique, Comunalien, Oldominion, The Algorythm). This time around Nickels handles the mic as well as the production. This album is aimed at individuals who have experienced heartache and need a source to turn to for advice. Not only does he offer great biblical insight, but he also delivers this theme in an addictively potent musical style. With songs like "Worth It" that blend a club banger feel with an interesting question, and "Steadfast," that mixes a lounge-feeling head nodder with a message of endurance; this album is sure to be an all around classic. [*Sphereofhiphop.com*]

New and recent releases:
Falling Tsar – *Falling Tsar* (*Illect Recordings*)
DJ Form – *Around The World In 20 Beats* (*Indie*)
Dirt – *Heavy Manners mixtape* (*Indie*)
Willie Will – *Reflection* (*Beatmart*)
Cross Movement – *HIStory: Our Place In His Story* (*CMR*)
Tre-9 – *The Farmer* (*Much Luvvv*)
Theory Hazit – *Extra Credit* (*HHIM*)
RedCloud – *Hawthorne's Most Wanted* (*Syntax Records*)
Freddie Bruno – *Hold Music* (*Illect Recordings*)

PIT MOVES SHIRTS

...& totebags!


PIT MOVES: #3, "CLEARING COBWEBS"
Your guide to the sweetest pit moves
Description: Moving forward in a semi-crouch position, alternately throwing forearms with elbows cocked outwards to inflict injury if contact with another is made, almost as if you were running out of a haunted mansion and clearing the cobwebs as you went (this title is unofficial, as this variation of the "windmill" is often labelled as such, and is seen at about every show). Speed starts off slow and rapidly accelerates. Many times this move is made travelling in a straight line, followed by retreating back or transitioning into another move.
(on a scale of 1-10)
Degree of difficulty: 3
Likelihood of injury: 5
Cardiovascular intensity: 9
HM
THE HARD MUSIC MAGAZINE

PIT MOVES: #1, "THE WIND MILL"
HM
THE HARD MUSIC MAGAZINE
Description: Either almost standing still or rotating around in the pit like a "mini twister" with fully extended arms (with a clenched fist at each end) swinging in full 180-degree rotation at as high an angle as the person's shoulder blades/rotater cuffs will allow. Approaching blurring speed is a necessity and you get "bonus points" for changing direction as well as suddenly stopping and maintaining balance.
(on a scale of 1-10)
Degree of difficulty: 6
Likelihood of injury: 10
Cardiovascular intensity: 8

PIT MOVES: #121, "THE TWO-STEP"
Description: Arms swing alternately across chest while hop-skipping on one toe, as the alternate leg swings back, and then one more hop-skip as the alternate leg swings forward with knees kicking high. Alternate legs and repeat many times as band plays through up and down beats..
(on a scale of 1-10)
Degree of difficulty: 1
Likelihood of injury: 1
Cardiovascular intensity: 5
HM

Pit Move #5: Picking up Change
Your guide to the sweetest pit moves
(on a scale of 1-10)
Degree of difficulty: 2
Likelihood of injury: 1
Cardiovascular intensity: 8
HM

AT HMMAG.COM

What **Good Charlotte** Says

YOU CAN'T REALLY COMPARE THEM TO ANY OF THE OVER-CHRONICLED LIVES OF FORMER TELEVISION CHILD STARS, YET GOOD CHARLOTTE HAS BEEN PLAYING TOGETHER AS A UNIT SINCE THEY WERE ALL TEENAGERS. IN THAT SENSE, YOU COULD SAY THEY'VE "GROWN UP IN THE PUBLIC EYE." THE COOL THING IS THEY'VE SUCCESSFULLY PROGRESSED AS MUSICIANS AND ARTISTS ... AND THEY'VE SOLD AN AWFUL LOT OF RECORDS (9,000,000+) ALONG THE WAY. IT'S ALWAYS REFRESHING TO MEET A BAND THAT'S BOTH SUCCESSFUL AND DOWN-TO-EARTH. CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW BETWEEN HM EDITOR DVP AND GOOD CHARLOTTE'S GUITARIST, BILLY MARTIN.

Tell me about the musical changes made in Good Morning Revival.
I guess that with this record… Obviously, I think with every record we've kind of changed a little bit. I think we try to not over-think it. We just try to go in and make the record that we want to make or where everybody's head space is. Benji and Joel (the Madden brothers) have been doing a lot of deejaying in LA, so they're into a lot more hiphop and dance stuff. I also play keyboards, so I'm always into trying to mix it up a little more electronical. This time around I think everybody was sorta on the same page without really talking about it. We kinda went in and that was sort of the nature of the songs. It was a little more upbeat, a little more beat-driven, a little more positive than the last record. It feels good. It's nice when we all move in the same direction without really having to try and force it.

Cool. So, if you had to describe what actually happens… let's say… I'm assuming that you've been working on music by yourself, and so the first time you walk into rehearsal space or a house or wherever you're at with the band members, what's it like? What is said before you actually plug in and play? How does that actually go about?
This time around it was a little different. In the past it's usually Benji and Joel sorta had written all the songs; and they sorta just write them on acoustic guitar and play stuff for the rest of us and if we liked it we kinda started jamming on it and maybe change parts or add some things to it. This time around we had a lot of time off to do things on our own and everybody did a lot of writing this time around. I did write a little bit on the last record, but this time I brought a lot more to the table. We all have our own little home studios at home and stuff. We would kind of just demo stuff and give each other CDs, like, 'Hey, check out this song I wrote,' or 'Check out this and see if you're into working on this.' Really, what we did this time, instead of just going two years of touring and then right into the studio and then back on tour and right into the studio, this time we did things casually. We took a couple months off to sort of relax and spend time writing and demo-ing ideas and we'd get together in the studio and kind of play each other ideas and the ones we liked, we'd work on them and sorta do a rough demo. And then we kind of go back to just living lives for a couple weeks or just sort of writing and hanging out and then we'd get back together and demo another batch of songs. We kind of did it really casually and progressively, rather than going in and being, 'Here's all the songs. We have to make a record out of this… We have to make it happen!' It was nice and it was stress-free. No one was freaking out about trying to get songs done. It definitely – the record came out later than we were planning on it, but I think it was the new process that we needed to take to make everybody feel happy and comfortable about recording.

How does it flesh out when you or other members of the band are rejecting a song? What is said or how does that happen?
I think most of the time the good songs and the bad songs jump out. You can tell a really good song. Or sometimes I might bring something in that's a little heavier, a little darker and I know in the back of my mind that it's probably not going to work for Good Charlotte, but I liked it, so I kinda demo it or bring it in or maybe Joel will bring something in that's really pop or way more pop than anything we've done and everybody's kind of, 'Ehhh, that feels weird.' And then sometimes there's a song that falls right in the middle. We'll be like, 'That sounds really different, but for some reason, it feels like it could be a Good Charlotte song.' Those songs just kind of stick out. Obviously, anyone's going to get their feelings hurt a little bit when someone's like, 'Nope, I don't like that one.' But you kinda got to get used to that. I mean, Benji and Joel had to deal with that for years – they'd play something and Paul and I were like, 'Ewww, I'm not really feeling that.' So, we kinda had to get used to that, too. If we bring something

in and they say, 'Um, I don't really think that one's going to work,' then you kind of have to tough it out. We're all looking at the big picture. We're all going for the same end result. Usually we're pretty open-ended.

That definitely helps. What magazines do you read? Why? What do you get out of them?
Honestly, there's not that many music magazines that I get really excited about. Most of the magazines just cover bands that either I'm not that interested in or I've never heard of. I guess, as far as music magazines, my favorite would probably be *Kerrang!* It comes out weekly and I always feel like they actually write about the bands that people are actually into, rather than the critics' favorite bands or the bands that are selling the most records. I read a lot of art magazines. I like *Juxtaposed*. It's like an art magazine that's pretty popular in California. I like the movie magazines, some animation magazines. I'm really into cartoons and movies and stuff. I read a lot of video game magazines, too.

Compare and contrast The Corpse Bride vs. Nightmare Before Christmas.
Oh, that's a hard comparison. I think when that movie came out, everybody was just expecting *The Nightmare Before Christmas, Part Two*. But I definitely wasn't. I knew that it was different. I think the animation looks so much more fluid and so much cleaner and better in *The Corpse Bride*. The kind of stuff they did with her hair and her dress and stuff like that using stop-motion – it's amazing how good they got it to look. But *Nightmare...* was just revolutionary. I mean, the songs in that movie… The songs are what kills me in that movie. The songs are so good. I definitely prefer the songs more on *Nightmare...* than I do on *Corpse Bride*; but *Corpse Bride* was more or less like a love tale told through puppets; whereas *Nightmare...* was sort of like a whole new world – a whole new take on holidays. It's like a really, really fresh idea. So, for sure, I like *Nightmare...* better; but I loved both of them.

You've sold over 9 million albums as a band, so I assume you've cleared over one million dollars in personal income. I know this is kind of a cliché question, but what is it like going from young, idealistic musician to millionaire? What are the funnest parts about having lots of money? And what are the biggest challenges?
Well, the funnest part, obviously, about being successful is, like you say, you don't really have to think as much about buying things. Like I said, I really love video games and dvd's and I'll go to the store and buy three video games at one time and not really have to think twice about it. Little things like that are pretty crazy – when you think you can do that without thinking twice. And the safety and security of knowing you're not struggling each day, like, 'How much am I gonna get on this paycheck?' Or this and that. Sure, that's a great feeling. Other things, like taking care of people in your life who, you know, you have the money to be able to do (it). That's a good feeling, too. The worst part of it is you don't know when the money's going to stop coming in. So many people get money and spend it all, just assuming that…

(cell phone beeps)

I would say the worst part is just budgeting it and not really knowing what the future leads to. You don't know when you're going to stop making money. You don't know when it's going to be gone. Sure, it's nice to know you can spend it, but you also have to be really smart about it, because you don't know when it's going to stop.

Yeah, that's real smart. I think of all the athletes that go from college to pro sports and just get these million-dollar contracts and you just wonder…
Absolutely. Too many stories you hear about people going bankrupt.

Well, tell me about the song, "The River." How was it collaborating with the Avenged guys?
That was really cool. We always talk about having a guest on the record. We're always like, "We should get someone we're huge fans of, like Dave Gahan from Depeche Mode or some sort of icon that all of us are really into." And then we were figuring, "That would be cool, but how much cooler would it be to have your friends come into the studio and do something?" We've been friends with the guys from Avenged (Sevenfold) for a couple years now and they sort of live around us and we see each other out all the time. We just said something one night, like, "Man, it'd be cool if you guys guested on the record," and they were like, "Really? You want us to guest on the record?" We were, "Sure, if you want to." And they're like, "We'll come in tomorrow." Sure enough, they came the very next day into the studio. "The River" was mostly done and we were kind of trying to figure out, "Maybe we can get Matt to sing the bridge or this…" And then we were like, "Man, let's get him to sing the whole second verse and see what it sounds like." So, he kind of sang all over the song and we kinda put it together and then Brian came in to do a lead over the end and I swear he did that, like, his first take. He's one of those guitar players. I sat in the studio with him to make sure he didn't play anything too crazy, because I knew that I was going to have to play it every night. I sat and tried watching. He had his whammy bar and did all this crazy stuff, and I don't even have a whammy bar on my guitar. But it was cool. Those guys are awesome musicians and good friends. It was just cool to do something like that. I think we share a lot of fans. I think their fans are really excited about it, too.

What do you think about Jesus Christ?
You know, I never really grew up in any religion. I know the other guys are really into that stuff; but it's just never really been in my family.

Any thoughts about His claims to be "the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me?"
You know what? I'm really just, like, completely uneducated and don't really know anything about that. I don't want to be offensive or say anything, but I really just don't know about any of that stuff.

That's a good, honest answer. What are your thoughts on the popularity of bands like Underoath, Demon Hunter, As I Lay Dying, Norma Jean, Switchfoot?
Um, for me, music is music. If a band makes good music, they make good music. I like Underoath. I have their CD. I think they make good music. Sometimes it… You know, I think that stuff pigeon-holes bands and makes their career really hard. I don't really know tons of bands in that genre, but I say a good band is a good band. If they make good music, that's really what it's supposed to be about. If your profession is music, ya know, then that's what you do.

Tell me about the song "Keep Your Hands Off My Girl." What made you launch out in a song that stretches your musical identity like that?
That song, actually, was more – not really a joke, but – more or less a sarcastic take. I think on every record we have a song that shows that we don't take ourselves too seriously. That we have a fun side. That was really the idea – with "Keep Your Hands…" – to have sort of a funny take on sort of living in LA and seeing the way people over-react. It's really the people around you that make a bigger thing than you do. So, it's just a take on that. I think a lot of people think that it's supposed to be about Joel talking about people trying to stay away from him, but more or less, I always hear him describe it in his interviews where he's out of the club and some girl will come up and say hi to him and then her boyfriend will come up a second later and be like, you know, "What's up, man? Why are trying to hit on my girlfriend?" And he's all, "Your girlfriend – she came up to me. I didn't come up to her." It's just misinterpretations like that and how funny people can freak out over… Really, it's just sort of a little sarcastic joke to show we don't take ourselves too seriously. Musically, it's really different for us. I'd say the most different song on the record and that's why we put a little internet video out about it first – before the record came out – just to kind of have some people go, "Wow, this is really different. This doesn't really sound like Good Charlotte." In the rest of the country that's the first single. "The River" is only the first single in America.

If you could freeze one moment in time, where you realized you could write and create music seriously – as opposed to, say, just winging it – when was that moment? What was it like?
I'm not sure what you mean? Do you mean, like, in a period of our band's career?

Yeah, or just you as a musician. At some point maybe some musicians are having fun and they're kind of winging it and they might get signed or get a lot of gigs, but it's not like a serious artist that's composing and writing music…
The last time I probably had that feeling was more or less in a band that I was in before Good Charlotte. I started a band when I was, like, 15 with two other guys. We were just like a three-piece. Sure, back then, the innocence that you have of not worrying about what anybody thinks about your band or if your song doesn't do well that you have to stress out about it. There's definitely some innocence about being a young band and trying for things and striving to get somewhere and wanting to work really hard. Even now with Good Charlotte, I feel like – even when we reach a certain level of success – we have to work even harder. Just because you get success doesn't mean you can sit back and enjoy the ride. You just have to work harder. Sure, there's pressures and stresses about if the song doesn't do good or the record doesn't do good or is the record label going to turn their back on you or are your fans going to turn their back? Is your career going to fall apart? All that kind of stuff definitely takes away from the creativity sometimes, so the last time I really just felt completely creative and felt like there was no pressure was probably back when I was 15 or

16, when I was first learning how to play guitar. I still love what I do and I wouldn't want to change it; but, for sure, you have to look at it like a job.

Tell me about your side projects as artist/designer and other business interests.
As far as creativity goes, my mind kind of never stops. I'm always thinking of new projects to do. I always grew up thinking that I would be a comic book artist or an animator or something in that field. And then one day I got a guitar and sorta turned my back on all that. Over the last three or four years or something, I kind of got back into drawing and realized how much I really loved that. That was the whole reason of starting a clothing line – just so that I can put my artwork on shirts and just have cool shirts that I like to wear. I did some artwork for the *Chronicles...* CD – the last album. Since I did that, it's opened up a lot of opportunities where people realized that I was an artist. I actually have a book coming out in October. It's a children's book that I wrote and illustrated. It's going to come with a little toy of the main character. It's a box with a toy and the book together. I'm pretty excited. That's like something I've always dreamed about. Obviously, there was a lot of work and I must have some kind of talent to get to be able to do that, but it's crazy how many doors being in Good Charlotte has opened and the opportunities that it gives me. So, there's a million things I want to do and I know this isn't going to last forever, so I try to seize all the time and opportunity I can while I have it.

Cool! Sounds awesome. If creativity were a body or a stomach, how would you nourish it? If it was a muscle, how would you exercise it?
You know what? Creativity for me is… I constantly need inspiration. I go through it so quickly, I always have to find new movies or buy new books by artists or find new music or something. I chew it up and spit it out so quickly, so I guess I would just say, "Try something different all the time. Never do the same thing over and over again. Just always push your boundaries and try doing everything a different way and try to find some new way to work it out."

Good advice. I've got a question that's kind of… I guess it's kind of good I saved it for last, because it's kind of confrontational – or it could be construed that way. I'm sure you've heard criticism, but here goes: "Pop punk is offensive to some critics. How do you answer that mindset or that thought?"
Yeah. You know, I don't ever think that we're a pop punk band. It always shocks me when people would say, "Do you guys think you're a punk band?" or "What's it like being a punk band in a pop world?" And I'm just shocked. I never thought we were a punk band. The only reason people say that is because journalists or critics gave us the tag "pop punk." We're definitely not a punk band. I think the only punk thing about us would really be our mentality that we just don't really care what other people think and we do exactly what we want to do and we do it like we like to do it. We do it for that reason. So, mentality-wise maybe we have that; but as far as the music goes, I never really listened to any punk music growing up. It's definitely not an influence for me. Maybe Benji, sure – there's a lot of punk bands he likes. Even Paul (Thomas), our bass player, he's into The Dead Kennedys and some stuff like that, but he likes more stuff like The Pixies and sometimes bands like that can kinda creep in as "founders of punk" in a certain way, but Benji loves The Clash and Rancid and stuff like that. So, I'm sure that kind of stuff finds an influence in our music, but if someone asked me what kind of music we are, I'd say we were a rock band. That's the easiest to me. Sure, there's some pop in our music. There's maybe a little bit of punk. Now we've got some more electronic stuff in it. Everybody in the band listens to a really diverse kinds of music. Everybody's into really different stuff. I don't really think… I like being sort of in-between genres, where it's hard to pinpoint. Because, if you listen to bands like Green Day and Blink 182 and New Found Glory – those bands are pop punk and they do it good. They're great. There's some similarities in our bands, but I really don't think we sound that much like a band like that. It's kind of "whatever." People are gonna call us what they want. We gave up that battle a long time ago.

> **"...I kind of feel like we were sort of the last generation of bands who got signed and really had to … develop … to grow up into the band that we were meant to be..."**

Good for you. If you could predict the future of music, comment on changes in style as well as the format delivery.
You know, music obviously – the industry is changing rapidly with things like myspace and youtube and just the internet making such a huge impact on music. All the major labels are merging together. There's, like, four major labels now. It's crazy to see that. It's definitely made it harder. It's harder to sell records, but it's also easier for young, new bands to get out and promote themselves; so for that sense – for, like, a young band that's trying to get out there and put their music on myspace and put their new music up and have just as easy of an opportunity of people hearing them as we do … or someone on a major label, who has millions of dollars backed into the promotion of the record. It kind of ups the ante for everybody. It gives some kid in his basement just as easy of a chance for millions of people to hear about them as someone like us. So, it's helped the music industry a lot. I think it's hurt the music industry a lot. It's almost like it's a whole new game now and everyone has to sort of re-invent how they sell records and market records. I kind of feel like we were sort of the last generation of bands who, you know, got signed and really had to get … the record label needed us to develop to grow up and sort of grow into the band that we were meant to be and get in a van and go on tour and do it that way. There wasn't myspace… There wasn't even high-speed internet when we got signed. It was still dial-up. The internet was popular, but it wasn't the epitome of music. So, it's just different. We have to learn to cope with all these new young bands coming out and having all these opportunities that we do have. We have to look at everything a little differently now. I hope that it's a good thing and all the record labels figure out someway to do it right.

When you have a chance to do an interview, sometimes in your head you're thinking, 'Man, there's something I want to get out and let people know.' What is that thing – if anything?
I guess with our band, when I read things or critics will say bad things about our band or they're dis us or this and that… To me, it's just funny, because I think so many people just make an assumption about our band and think that they already know everything just based on what they read or what they assume by watching our videos or simply just seeing a picture of us in a magazine. 'Oh, I already know exactly the kind of people those guys are.' It's pretty funny how often we'll meet other bands or a journalist will come into an interview saying, "You know what? I really hated your guys' band and now I'm leaving the interview, like, shocked. I don't know what to say. I'm just so surprised." We don't take ourselves too seriously. We don't think we're changing rock and roll. We're just lucky and we're happy to be doing what we're doing. I think most people think that any band, when you get a certain level of success, we think things that are not… There's not ever gonna be a chance for us to truly… for every one of our fans or everyone to truly get to know us; because that's impossible. So, I just would hope that people would try to read into things a little more and not quite the face value of what people would assume.

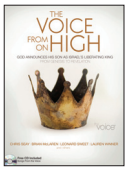
Right on. If I can, I'd like to throw my two cents in and encourage you; because I think you're one of the good guys. And, like, one example is MxPx took you guys out on a tour when they were bigger and had a good following and then you took them out to kind of return the favor.
Yeah, that's the whole industry. If someone helps you out, you've gotta hook 'em back up. That's the whole reason we've gotten anywhere: is because of friends that we've made and the fans that have supported our band. Because it's never been critics who are helping our band or radio stations helping our band or anyone like that; because all those people just don't seem to like our band. So it's the other bands we've made friends with and the people who have helped us. Luckily, we've gotten to a point where we can help them back. That kind of stuff is pretty important to us, so I appreciate that.

That's great. It's not something you have to do, but you do it.
Sure.

Thanks for your time, man. Have a great day!
Cool, no problem. Thanks.

✖

THE VOICE



A BIBLE SPEAKING TO A NEW GENERATION BY ADAM P. NEWTON

I SPENT 6 YEARS OF MY LIFE WORKING IN A CHRISTIAN BOOKSTORE AND OH, DO I HAVE PLENTY OF STORIES TO TELL ABOUT ALL OF THE CRAZY PRODUCTS I SOLD. FROM TESTAMINTS, WWJD? EVERYTHING, AND CHEESY T-SHIRTS, TO THOMAS KINKADE PAINTINGS, *LEFT BEHIND* BOOKS, AND EVERY MANNER & GENRE OF "CHRISTIAN" MUSIC OUT THERE. TRUST ME – IF THERE'S BEEN A LAME MARKETING IDEA OUT THERE FOR THE CHRISTIAN MARKET, I'VE SOLD IT AND SOLD IT IN BULK.

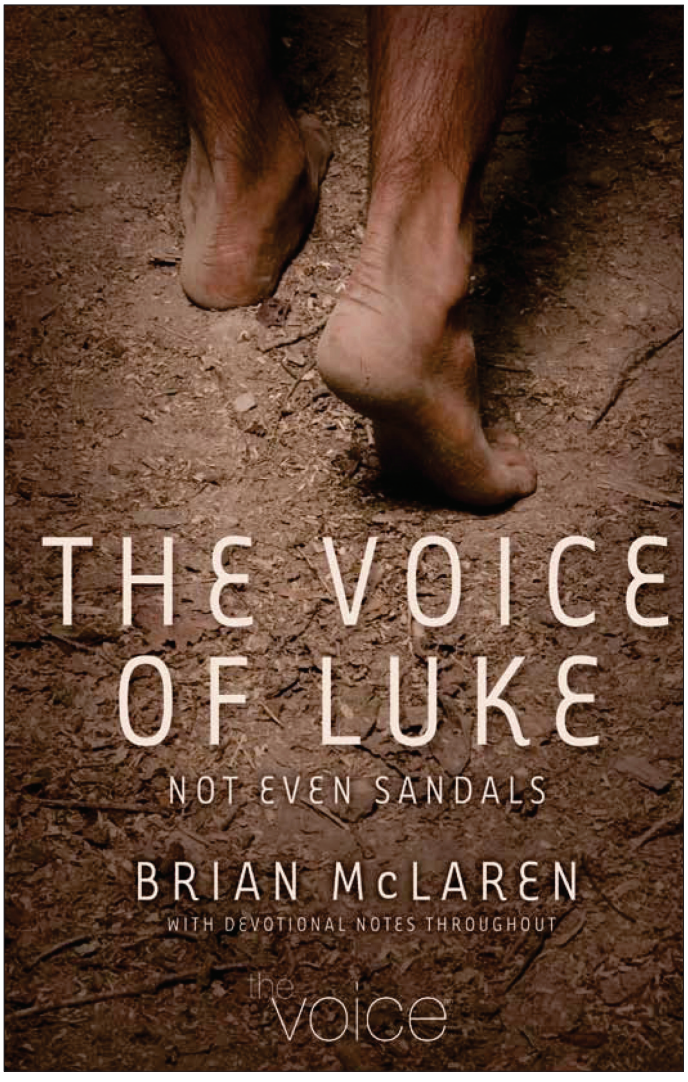
But, in the long run, what I loved about my job was talking with customers about the Bible. It was always my pleasure to discuss those black and red words, what those words meant to the people who originally heard & read them thousands of years ago, and what those words mean to us now. Moreover, what I found over and over again was that the average person never understood why there were so many types of Bibles. It's not that people didn't appreciate having those options, but more that didn't know why they needed them. And yet, while I began my tenure sharing their confusion, in the end, I truly began to realize that it was better to have more choices than not because people learn, read, and process information in vastly dissimilar ways.

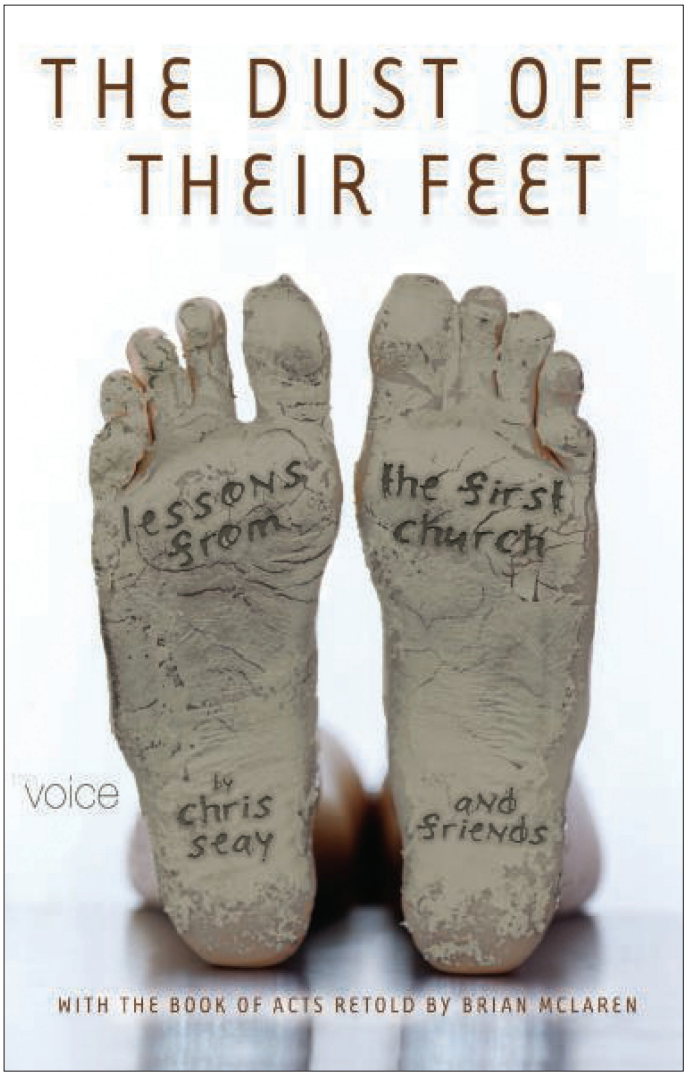
So, when I learned that Chris Seay, acclaimed author/pastor/church planter, had launched *The Voice*, an extensive re-telling of the story that is the Bible, I was more than intrigued. After learning more about the initial books in the project, I sought out Chris and some of his co-collaborators for a conversation about what is driving this venture, its origins, and where he and his team are hoping this is all headed.

APN: Chris, how many authors do you have working on this project? What are their respective backgrounds? What was behind the decision to choose certain authors?
Chris Seay: Right now, we have 40 artists translating *The Voice* – novelists, pastors, professors, poets, and songwriters, some you have heard of, and some you haven't. Each artist was carefully chosen and we work diligently to match personalities with the original writer in the Bible to accentuate the voice that has been toned down by teams of writers in other translations. Some artists were chosen from the beginning of the project, some have changed, and some have yet to come. It has a life of its own, and God is directing it.

So, when you say songwriters, are there records to accompany these books? What does that process look like?
Don Chaffer (of Waterdeep, Producer, writer of Job): We've released two records so far – *the songs in Volume 1* all come from the Psalms, while *the songs on Volume 2* find their inspiration in the Advent/Christmas texts from Handel's *Messiah*. In general, we bring together all of the artists at one time, setting up a kind of "summer camp" time for the musicians. All of the recording is done live, with no overdubs, which gives the songs this markedly organic, heart-felt feel. Everyone involved truly feel that this represents the heart of *The Voice* – it's a human, unique, community-based contribution to text and music, as different people merge together their different takes and ideas into a vibrant, living whole.

Who are the theological consultants? What are their respective backgrounds? Why were they chosen?
Kelly Hall (Editor): Dr. David Capes of Houston Baptist University heads up the Scholars on the project, and he has handpicked NT and OT specialists. There are scholars from around the globe working on this project. Most are professors, but we also have a few pastors and even a lawyer! There's a complete list of them on the website, hearthevoice.com, and it's there that people can visit to read more about the whole thing.




THE DUST OFF THEIR FEET
lessons from the first church
voice
by chris seay
and friends
WITH THE BOOK OF ACTS RETOLD BY BRIAN MCLAREN

What does the editorial process look like in general?
Kelly: The process is a massive one. The artist sends me an original draft in ten-chapter increments, (unless it's a Psalm or a shorter book of the Bible). I send it out to have the verse numbers checked or put in. It's then delivered to Dr. Capes who assigns it to a scholar who specializes in that book. The scholar returns the text to Dr. Capes, who gives it back to me, and I send it back to the artist for revision. We then get to do this over again (minus the versification), so that each book has had two reviews and two revisions. I now make the first edit, submit it to Chris for approval, and send the manuscript to the publisher, Thomas Nelson. At Thomas Nelson, it goes through several style edits to be shaped into its more final layout (for some, it has a screenplay feel, while others may have a different look) and another final theological check by Dr. Capes. It comes back to the Ecclesia Bible Society again for another proof and acceptance round before going on to typesetting. The process is long, as some books have taken six months or more, but accuracy is a top priority.

What is the greater hope (from your perspective) for *The Voice* and what can be done with *The Voice* as a new translation/reading/interpretation of the Bible?
Kelly: Wow. What are my hopes for *The Voice*? That's a good but tough question, actually. My greatest hope is that this work would honor God, and work alongside His movement in this world. That people would discover (or rediscover) and embrace God, this man, His story in a very personal way. That they find healing, and through that healing their relationships would change, families would change, communities would change, and on and on. What I see that is different with *The Voice* is its artistry. It's engaging. It's living to be read. In a world where we find ourselves pushed, pulled and deterred by technology, a shift is taking place and people are craving a richness that cannot be filled by the cold blips and blinks of monitors. We are disengaged and easily distracted, so it's time for something different, a fresh approach to this amazing history. This is just a tool to be used by God to meet people where they are, to capture them by His love, through the acts of His Son.

What were some of your original reasons/tendencies/ideas for the creation of such a Bible project? Why do we need yet another version of the Bible?
Chris: We need another translation of the Bible because we need another translation of the bible. There are a million different ways of learning, a million different approaches and styles. It would be great if one translation would be relatable to every person, but unfortunately it's not. I haven't studied all the different versions of the Bible, but my personal position is that each person will be drawn to what they are drawn to. I have seen, again and again, how *The Voice* has been the exact right approach at the exact right time for people in need, people in my own family, people across the U.S. through letters and e-mails sent in to the leaders on this project, and my home church community. It's all about a transformative God who's reaching His people – He's got them by the heart.

✖

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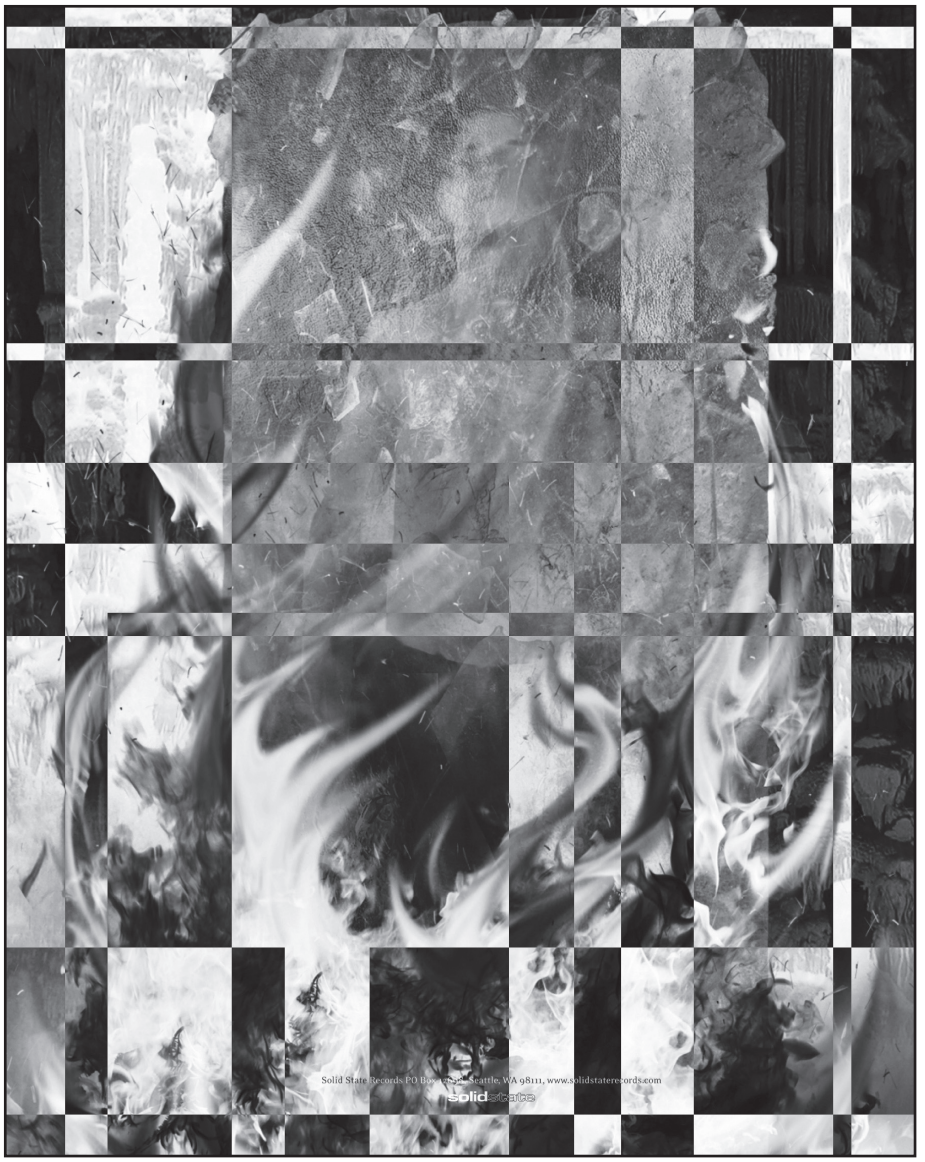


BECOMING THE ARCHETYPE

THE PHYSICS OF FIRE

An archetype is defined as an original model on which something is patterned. So, for those familiar with this band and their stunning debut, Terminate Damnation, you know that they have already "become" a metal archetype. While it's entirely possible the band's name has more to do with "becoming" like our archetypal Lord – that is, more Christ-like – than being a prototypical metal band, there is no denying that their penchant to "forge their own steel" has not been in vain. In fact, one can marvel at why a label like Solid State signed an anomaly such as BTA; nevertheless, it was a bold, insightful and monumental move on their part – one that has been a blessing for metal fans both young and old.

Hence, BTA's second volume of trendsetting progressive death metal, *The Physics of Fire*, arrives with great anticipation, but some speculation in lieu of the infamous "off-season" personnel changes that have pared them down to a four-piece. Needless to say, hemorrhaging two guitarists and grafting-in singer/songwriter/guitarist Alex Kenis (Aletheian)—who injects just the right amount of melodic vocal and technical guitar – seems almost surgical. Adoring fans have nothing to fear, because the band's complex, creative, heavy yet melodic, uplifting and thought-provoking "we respect where metal has been" style of music – replete with uncompromising message – remains essentially intact.

Overall, *Physics...* (dark and conceptual) may not have quite the initial jaw-dropping impact as their debut (only because that release covered so much ground, so quickly) but the songs are more refined and accessible – with fewer meanderings – yet they retain both the dynamic contrast and the power so integral to BTA's passionate catharsis. Hardly possible, but Jason Wisdom's growl seems more intense, with greater clarity; he spews forth metaphorical tales and truths of spiritual fire with ➡

Rating system

05 *CLASSIC*
04 *FABULOUS*
03 *SOLID*
02 *SUSPECT*
01 *AMISS*
***** *1/2*

unrivaled conviction. Seamless, old-school solos gloriously soar over technical, yet heavy riffs, relentless bass pulsations and frenetic drum gyrations – all while "Count" Hecox masterfully weaves his piano into and out of the fray. Unequivocally, this release is huge – with *Physics* these guys are keeping the "fire" of the faith and of metal burning brightly. Therefore, I urge you ... shed the doubt, feel the fire, embrace the metal! ~~[SOLID STATE] JONATHAN SWANK~~

HASTE THE DAY

PRESSURE THE HINGES

Pressure The Hinges is Haste The Day's third full-length album, but the first for new singer Stephen Keech. After losing their original and beloved singer Jimmy Ryan to marriage, Indianapolis' finest melodic metalcore act kidnapped the replacement fresh out of high school after he left Denver-based New Day Awakening. The stakes were high, but any doubt of the scab's ability is deeply buried as soon as the album's instilling intro is followed by arresting pumps of roar. Guitarist Brennan Chaulk and bassist Michael Murphy quickly hand off to each other the backup vocal baton as if in a race to outrun Keech's intensity. They never beat him, but their melodic overtone adds a new lacquer to the band's direction as their traditionally heavy focus naturally turns to longer elaborate shreds and intriguing interludes. But what has not changed and perhaps never will, is the group's infamous emitting energy and desire to prevail. ~~[SOLID STATE] DAN FRAZIER~~

AMBER PACIFIC

TRUTH IN SINCERITY

Here are the things I learned about Amber Pacific before I even heard their record: They were in Alternative Press's Most Anticipated Albums of 2007 issue; their single "Fall Back into My Life" is in the new *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movie; they've been on *Warped Tour* for three years running. When I finally heard the record, these things did not surprise me. Their pop-punk hooks and melodies seemed to be contagious enough (and in the same vein) as bands on a summer spend-fest such as *Warped Tour*. Playing it three years running, they've garnered the ears of teenage kids who grew up watching *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. And with the Internet now determining how popular a band is, their 6-million some odd MySpace plays is notable. All this aside, I don't know how many times I could listen to the record. It's not a technical thing – the band is tight, they know how to write hooks, and the songwriting is above mediocre – but there just seem to be other pop-punk bands that do it better. Moral of the story: This record will be hit or miss with fans. If for some reason you find yourself singing the hooks in your car, you'll listen to it again; personally, I think I'll just put on a Good Charlotte record. ~~[HOPELESS] DAVID STAGG~~

MUTE MATH

FLESH AND BONES ELECTRIC FUN (DVD)

1969 was an amazing and pivotal year for rock and roll. Woodstock shook the world, as did Hendrix. Black Sabbath's self-titled debut album came out and a new super group called Led Zeppelin did the impossible -- they toured the United States twice and released their first two albums. Those that were lucky enough to see any of these shows were never the same after seeing this quartet twist and bend the blues in new catastrophic directions. Anyone that witnessed the 18 to 25 minute spectacle of "Dazed And Confused" live with Jimmy Page's violin bow tricks on the electric guitar and his call and response tripping with Robert Plant had to be forever changed. Certainly they'd never forget what they witnessed. Rock and roll had a new, almost supernatural presence to reckon with for the next decade.

The band Mute Math should thank their lucky stars to be mentioned in the very same breath as these rock pioneers, but they are indeed unleashing something on their audiences night after night that none of them will forget. The band tears through their fairly standard set from the past year: "Typical," "Chaos," "Plan B," "Stare At The Sun" and "Obsolete" without nary a rest. The band has not reinvented the musical wheel, but they're playing their own tune and they seem to really enjoy it. Their confidence and attitude is contagious, and the audience is soon in their back pocket along for the ride. "Control," "Stall Out" and "Noticed" each add something different to the mix as the band expresses many sides of itself: soft, progressive, experimental, rock, and soul. It's when they break into their closing number that they forever change the perspective of everyone in the audience with eyes to see. "Break The Same" shows the band moving in one direction, but with the energy of four different voices standing tall on their own but cohesively side-by-side. When the song breaks down, bass player Roy Mitchell-Cardenas is banging on a spare kick drum that's sitting atop a keyboard stand. Drummer Darren King has taken his sticks to anything solid: mic stands, an upside-down drum stool, the hard top of Paul Meany's piano, or the floor. Meany is doing handstands on the piano keys, rolling over the instrument and jumping around the stage. Guitarist Greg Hill picks up his effects board at some point and starts coaxing wild and ethereal sounds out of it like a feedbacking electric instrument. It's some of the craziest five to eight minutes in the current state of rock and roll. After leaving the audience breathless and mind-blown, they return for an encore of the instrumental "Reset," which capitalizes on more frenzied activity, including the custom theremin-atar type instrument that Meany relinquishes to the audience midway through the song, effectively creating a new song every night.

Everyone that sees this is going to remember it the rest of their life. More than one person has surely thought, 'They need to document this.' Fortunately for us, cool heads have prevailed and the DVD *Flesh And Bones Electric Fun* was recorded in wonderful stereo by several moving cameras, including one mounted on the headstock of Meany's key-tar. Those that haven't witnessed this experience in a club or arena setting yet will now be able to preview it in color on this disc. Trust me on this one: people have to witness this while it's happening. It's that special.

~~[TELEPROMPT / WARNER BROS.] DOUG VAN PELT~~

NEON HORSE

S/T

Neon Horse is not a band – it is an entity. Consisting of an undisclosed amount of members who are Los Angeles music veterans from over 20 something unnamed bands, they formed from sporadic practice sessions into an ambiguous anonymity. What keeps them from being labeled as just a compilation of collaborations is their music's unanimous nasal vocals provided by the only band member with a name: Norman Horse. He is the master of ceremonies, welcome to his circus. Regardless of their mysterious identity or origin, the band creates superb danceable indie rock that is usually favored by acts across the big pond. The Britpop comparison is undeni-

Ratings

	DV	Writer
Becoming The Archetype *The Physics Of Fire*	04	04*
Haste The Day *Pressure The Hinges*	03*	04
Amber Pacific *Truth In Sincerity*	03	02
Mute Math *Flesh And Bones Electric Fun* (DVD)	04*	
Neon Horse *S/T*	04	04
Virgin Black *Requiem – Mezzo Forte*	03*	04
Wavorly *Conquering The Fear Of Flight*	03*	03
Megadeth *United Abominations*	03	03
Deliverance *As Above ~ So Below*	03	04
Chasing Victory *Fiends*	03*	03*
MxPx *Secret Weapon*	04	

able, especially with the moody verse of "I Know – I Just Don't Care." However, certain tracks such as "Merciless Mother" and "Little Wall" rip out with a more vintage vinyl esthetic. But then the synths snap back in and make everybody mooove. [TOOTH & NAIL] DAN FRAZIER

VIRGIN BLACK

REQUIEM – MEZZO FORTE

Listen #1: I thought this was interesting; listen #2: I started feeling the power and rhythms; then, after listen #3: WOW! This CD is the second part of a trilogy, with part one described as almost entirely a classical music/orchestra sound, and part 3 is to be an all-out barrage of heaviness and death growls. Knowing this in advance helps to greatly understand and appreciate the transition found here, which is a collision of the two styles with a superb balance and mixture, starting very beautifully, and getting increasingly more mixed and ending with power and heaviness. Featuring beautiful orchestration, layered melodic singing, an amazing mix of powerful crunching guitar chords and plodding drums, this was truly a powerful experience. This journey sounds so much like the soundtrack to a movie; I could easily see this made into an opera. A listen through with the lyrics in hand helps to understand some of the wording. After that, turn it up in surround sound, sit back and close your eyes to experience an emotional musical journey like few others. If you only like your music loud and extreme, this may not be for you; but if you can appreciate the blend of styles (man, can I ever) then this is a blessing. I eagerly await the other two installments. [THE END] JEFF MCCORMAK

WAVORLY

CONQUERING THE FEAR OF FLIGHT

Wavorly is a radio-friendly band. *Conquering the Fear of Flight* has song after song that could easily be plugged in between radio DJs' quick quips and maniacal commercials. This doesn't necessarily mean their debut release is bad; in fact, it's just the opposite. It's a very well-produced, emo-stacked record with hooks and technical proficiency. But how much radio can you stand? The record kicks off with a driving, tight guitar riff that bleeds through to a melodic rock song; don't set yourself up for a record of this stature. Past the first song, *Conquering...* becomes a much more chorus-oriented, sing-a-long type of album. Their first single, "Praise and Adore," is well-crafted and extremely addictive, ending with the classic symphonic string section over the rocking guitars. (Unfortunately, this happens more than once on the record.) On more than one occasion I found myself humming the chorus when I wasn't listening to the record. There's no doubt that Wavorly knows how to write a pop song. They've managed to craft a solid, mildly original debut release. I don't know how much radio-friendly rock you can take, but if it's your thing, you'll love Wavorly. For fans of Switchfoot, My Chemical Romance. [FLICKER] DAVID STAGG

MEGADETH

UNITED ABOMINATIONS

When singer/guitarist David Mustaine formed Megadeth in 1983, he was determined to put out the most intense form of metal ever constructed. He accomplished this by incorporating thrashy guitar riffs into rich melodies, while vocally disposing his depression and sounding off on global affairs. Twenty years and several lineup changes later, Megadeth continues to utilize that formula as evident on their eleventh studio album, *United Abominations*. Unfortunately, this style has become stale. Like their previous albums, Megadeth pours out the vintage rock that made them famous, but that's where the dilemma lies: it all sounds the same. They come across as a slower, more fine-tuned metal band with Mustaine showcasing what appears to be a limited vocal range. When grieving their disapproval with Capitol Hill on war-conscious anthems like "Amerikhastan" and the title track, they use a news program-esque sentiment to introduce the songs, but it's just a disaster. Their appeal to identify with Generation X is applaudable, but quite simply, they come up short. Fortunately, Megadeth keeps some of the music fresh by wandering outside of the political bubble for a sleuth of spiritual efforts. Over an assortment of decelerated black metal melodies, Mustaine sings about feeling protected during dark times on "Never Walk Alone … A Call To Arms" and achieving inner strength on "Play For Blood." The jewel of the album occurs when Lacuna Coil's Cristina Scabbia helps Mustaine breathe new life into an earlier classic, "A Tout Le Monde (Set Me Free)." Megadeth continues stroking their political awareness and taps into their spirituality on *United Abominations*, but they don't effectively execute their ideologies like they were once able to. [ROADRUNNER] BEAR FRAZER

DELIVERANCE

AS ABOVE ~ SO BELOW

After years of silence, the new Deliverance album is a logical follow-up to 1995's *Camelot in Smithereens,* as opposed to the confusing blips and bleeps of the industrial and electronica laced ambiance of 2001's *Assimilation*. The Latin titled opening instrumental doesn't really fit, but it is regal in stature. From there things progress into some of the most intricate riffing of Jimmy P. Brown II's career, even stacking up to the technicality of 1990's *Weapons of Our Warfare*. His vocals continue in the vein of David Bowie and Queensryche's Geoff Tate, but Jimmy's own twist is evident. Guitarist Mike Phillips is on board, his previous stint with Deliverance being *Stay Of Execution* in 1992. His unique stamp is heard throughout. Newcomers Tim Kronyak (bass) and Mike Reed (drums) definitely add to the mix. Erstwhile Deliverance drummer Kevin Lee even makes an appearance on three tracks. Jimmy continues to struggle with his faith, making the lyrics all the more pertinent to this reviewer. Clocking in at over 11 minutes, "Thistles" is a grandiose instrumental, but leaves the listener wondering "what if" in the lyrical department. The production and low end on this disc are so incredible that it blew a speaker or two in my vehicle. Seriously! Expect a bill soon, Mr. Brown. Retroactive Records is fast becoming the home of many favorite metal bands of the 90's. And while *As Above – So Below* doesn't grab you on first listen, it is easily the best Deliverance album since 1994's *River Disturbance*. [RETROACTIVE] CHAD OLSON

CHASING VICTORY

FIENDS

"We want to confront the deepest darkness in each of us and expose it for what it truly is: an enemy which has no power when brought into the light," explains vocalist Adam Harrell of Chasing Victory when referring to the title *Fiends* the band chose for their follow-up to the largely screamo effort, *I Call This Abandonment*. Musically, the band has also chosen to lighten the mood a bit, allowing more ethereal guitars and sonic white space to dwell between the riffs such as on "Wolves." The title track elevates Chasing Victory to another melodic level and reveals a better side of the band. Along the way, Harrell makes slight vocal nods to many, including Jonathan Newby of Brazil and Billy Werner of Hot Cross. *Fiends* is a potent sophomore effort and displays the best is yet to come. [MONO VS. STEREO] MATT CONNER

MXPX

SECRET WEAPON

This Bremerton trio has avoided releasing any duds in their long career. And this album might stand as one of their highlights, along with *Life In General*, *Slowly Going...* or *The Ever Passing Moment*. It might also be their most spiritually-minded album (see "You're On Fire") since the early, early days or maybe when they sang other's lyrics in *On The Cover*. The expected effervescence is present all over these 16 songs, as is the always impressive musicianship and tightness. Mike Herrera sounds like he's not on autopilot and may actually be passionate about what he's singing; but it's slightly more relaxed than, say, desperate. As the band has aged (gasp), they've matured into more rock than rebellious punk, which might explain the chord structures and riffs being more straightforward. Still, in songs like "Contention" guitarist Tom Wisniewwski will scrape his pick across the strings for a second just to remind us how much fun slop and attitude can sound. Lyrics like "Punk Rock Celebrity" and "Shut It Down" seems to show MxPx not taking themselves too seriously, yet still willing to point a finger and lecture with empathy in their voice, experience on their side. You'll hear their tongue firmly planted in cheek in "Top Of The Charts." What's great about this album is that it gets better and picks up a little more frantic pace as it plays on. It's hard to pick what'll be live favorites in the future, but "Never Better Than Now" might be one of those. [TOOTH & NAIL] DOUG VAN PELT

SULLIVAN

COVER YOUR EYES

Sure, I guess you could say that Sullivan could essentially be classified in the indie or alt-rock category. And I suppose you could also say that Tooth & Nail already has several similar sounding bands. But passing them off that easily is not only irresponsible. It would also be a shame. That's because you would be missing out on one of the best rock albums to be released in 2007. Sullivan has thus far, at least for a career spanning an EP and one full-length, been considered a band with incredible promise. And they continue to make good on that with *Cover Your Eyes*, an intelligently written and incisively played collection of (mostly) three-minute rock songs. "Great For My Collection" begins with a rhythmic acoustic strum before giving way to a tightly wound, memorable chorus upon which vocalist Brooks Paschal reveals his inner Billy Corgan. "Tell Me I'm Wrong" and album opener "F-Stop" venture into radio-rock and pop-punk territory, showcasing Sullivan's ability to cross multiple sub-genres while retaining their overall identity. On *Close Your Eyes*, the band continues to showcase a substance behind the buzz yet also makes a marked progression, under the guidance of skilled producer James Paul Wisner (Dashboard Confessional, Underoath), toward a cohesive, identifiable Sullivan sound. ~~[TOOTH & NAIL] MATT CONNER~~

THE SEND

COSMOS

Listen to The Almost familiar story: huge Tooth & Nail band spins off member's solo project as new band. Two caveats – Falling Up, successful BEC band, isn't Underoath massive, and Joseph A. Kisselburgh, aka The Send, left for this gig. You may hear familiar crashings, but where you once heard Linkin Park, Relient K, & electronica, now acoustic rock arpeggios and beautiful melodies echo classic rock and Mae. "Fairweather" opens typically – acoustic intertwining with tasty electric before delivering the big rockin' chorus, "You are the One who will keep me breathing / when all I have been is hurt / by fair-weather friends." This formula reappears, sometimes subbing piano, so when "The Fall" hangs onto that gentle ballad vibe throughout, you're surprised. Lyrically it evokes a recurrent theme of the disc, encountering God revealed in creation (cf. Hebrews 1:2-3, etc.), "And when You're far from me / The Earth falls to its knees… / You're in the air I breathe…." Kisselburgh explores such throughout the maturing soundscape of the *Cosmos*. ~~[TOOTH & NAIL] CAREY WOMACK~~

SEVENTH STAR

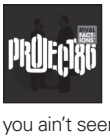
THE UNDISPUTED TRUTH

Old Christian metalheads are sometimes dumb. You know the type. They share at least one (or all) of the following characteristics: They still have a mullet or other form of very long hair. They live at home with their mother. They haven't purchased a legitimately new album in almost a decade. And they only listen to the narrow form of heavy metal that is "theirs" (melodic, death, thrash, black). They'd be a participant in a local Dungeons And Dragons club if it wasn't "satanic." What makes these guys (and half a dozen girls) dumb is that many of them have failed to realize that modern day hardcore is the Christian metal of its time. While the shaved head differs from the once proud mane, there is still a foot perched atop the monitor wedge and the singer belts out full-on preaching lyrics. This is the passionate music with a meaning of the last decade. If frontman Johnny Intravaia can't scream/sing these lyrics to you, it sounds as if he'd just as soon share them face-to-face ... or else he'd die inside. Some say heavy metal saved rock from the death pronouncement by Lester Bangs. Let it be known that hardcore turned around and saved metal's behind from extinction. *The Undisputed Truth* carries on where 2005's *Brood Of Vipers* left off. A little less groove than Hatebreed sometimes chugs into, with most attention paid to riffage and distortion, like Unearth, Jesus Wept, or Nodes. ~~[FACEDOWN] KERN COUNTY KID, THE~~

I AM NOT I AM

DEAR GOD, WE MUST RETURN FIRE

The first thing on new screamcore act I Am Not I Am's agenda needs to be saving money for an upgrade on such a lo-fi release as *Dear God, We Must Return Fire*. The five-song EP sounds rougher than the music found upon it, which is in itself quite intense. With that said, fans of Underoath or Norma Jean might just find something to like on this initial offering. There's definitely nothing new here, so I Am Not I Am will hardly be breaking sales records or winning awards. However, the musicianship here is solid even if frontman Troy Cash possesses one of the weaker voices in the genre. If anything, this album might simply serve as notice for a stronger future effort. For now, *Dear God* is take-it-or-leave-it at best. ~~[TENFOLD] MATT CONNER~~



PROJECT 86

RIVAL FACTIONS

If you were thrown off or confused by the Atlantic Records one-off *Truthless Heroes*, you ain't seen nothin' yet. Project 86 boldly approaches this album on their own terms, sticking their creative necks out there and relying on keyboards and some standard rock singing to get the lead out. What is shocking at first soon makes sense when "Pull Me Closer, Violent Dancer" comes blasting out of the speakers, matching the lyrical wit and rock deconstructive power of one Marilyn Manson. Maybe even a tad of MM's bitterness can be found in "The Sanctuary Hum," where God is being asked to "save us from Your chosen ones." P86 seems to fill out these new threads pretty well, which is a much better fit than, say, the uber-tight jeans that emo would've been. Yikes! It's as if the band is messing with us, but it feels much heavier and infectious than self-indulgent. I think they've pulled off a great album here; and they've done it by fairly drastically reinventing themselves but without abandoning their core identity. ~~[TOOTH & NAIL] DOUG VAN PELT~~

THE ROCKET SUMMER

DO YOU FEEL

If you haven't heard of The Rocket Summer (much like myself, before I was assigned to write this review), here's a little history: It's one dude, Bryce Avary, who is some incredibly talented, music virtuoso who writes all the music and plays all the instruments on all his records, defined by his somewhat high voice and incredibly optimistic songs. The optimism is a perfect fit for his sound. It's power pop to the extreme. Guitars laced with quarter-note piano, incredibly catchy hooks, definable song patterns. It's as if Wheatus and Daniel Powter had a baby. But for the record, this CD isn't going anywhere anytime soon. It's extremely addictive and I've been listening to it for days now. If there's any criticism, it's one that people could have with pop overall: Sometimes, the songs sound a lot alike. But it's what defines Avary and his Rocket Summer sound, and it's good to see someone *own* power-pop coming from an indie world. ~~[ISLAND/DEF JAME] DAVID STAGG~~

Ratings

	DV	Writer
Sullivan *Cover Your Eyes*	03*	04
The Send *Cosmos*	03	04
Seventh Star *The Undisputed Truth*	04	03*
I Am Not I Am *Dear God, We Must Return Fire*	02*	02
Project 86 *Rival Factions*	04	
The Rocket Summer *Do You Feel*	03*	04
Paramore *Riot!*	04	
Sleeping Giant *Dread Champions Of The Last Days*	04	05
Kekal *The Habit Of Fire*	03*	04
The Fold *Secrets Keep You Sick*	04	04
The Dear & Departed *Something Quite Peculiar*	03	03
Storyside B *We Are Not Alone*	03	02*
Ruth *Secondhand Dreaming*	02*	03
Dizmas *Tension*	03*	03
Jon McLaughlin *Indiana*	04	04
Kiss The Gunner *Why Are We So Dead?*	03*	

PARAMORE
RIOT!
This amazing band has risen above the promise of *All We Know Is Falling*. Hayley Williams' voice is prominently placed over each melodic note, making each well-planned rest anticipate her return. Emo's been waiting for Hayley ... and radio's sure to give us a heavy dose of "That's What You Get" all summer long. Filled with hooks and even an Underoath-like chorus every now and then, these 11 songs beg for attention. [FUELED BY RAMEN] DOUG VAN PELT

SLEEPING GIANT
DREAD CHAMPIONS OF THE LAST DAYS
It's the beginning of the first and Sleeping Giant is up to bat for Team Facedown. This band has been working hard thru the whole off season. Now they are up for their 1st time at the plate. Oh, what is this?? They are making a declaration of Who Jesus Christ is and a cry to awaken the American Christian church? This has not been seen since the days of Unashamed and Focused! Here is the pitch … and it is a up and, yes, it is out of the park! Sleeping Giant has put Team Facedown up 3-0 with their amazing songwriting, worshipful lyrics and a declaration of The Lion of Judah with three praise and worship songs ending this monumental album by one of Redlands' finest. [FACEDOWN] ROBERT HOUSTON

KEKAL
THE HABIT OF FIRE
On their fifth album, Indonesia's favorite metalurgical sons now make what they call urban avant-garde metal. Prog metal by any other name though it may be, albeit now with occasional R&B and club music influences in the most obtuse places, still sounds as breathtaking. Here Kekal makes their definitive move away from extreme metal of the deathy, grindy, thrashy mode. Even then, *The Habit of Fire* distinguishes itself as proggishness delivered by guys who know their way around sonic brutality. Textural and timbral variations go through mathy, angular metrical changes in songs that stretch as long as a quarter-hour. The surge of restrained menace from their earlier aesthetic helps to keep the proceedings compelling and, overt and extended displays of virtuosity notwithstanding, not wanky. The artistic makeover results in what seems to be a fully realized concept album, as its 11 songs flesh out the tale of a futuristic people seeking salvation as they endure a banal, mechanized society. Nuanced in its aural violence and beauty and technically stunning, Kekal have their toughest time yet of topping themselves here.
[OPEN GRAVE] JAMIE LEE RAKE

THE FOLD
SECRETS KEEP YOU SICK
The Fold play powerful poppy rock. The same style that Anberlin has proudly perfected and Forever Changed admired. However, The Fold lacks any '80s nostalgia or desire to sound heavier than they really are. For their second album, *Secrets Keep You Sick*, the band continues their drive to create songs that are epic yet maintain a level of amiable artistic ascendancy. Once again, the lyrics spill out from singer Daniel Castady's turmoil with life and carry his message to always have hope. And by reliably providing such upbeat catchy songs, it's difficult to not listen and follow. ~~[TOOTH & NAIL] DAN FRAZIER~~

THE DEAR & DEPARTED
SOMETHING QUITE PECULIAR
Several bands come to mind while listening to The Dear & Departed. Think the soft crooning of David Grahan (Depeche Mode), the pop synth and bass of The Cure mixed with the punk beats and gang vocals of AFI (sans the shrill singing and runny eyeliner). While the comparisons are there, it would be unfair to assume originality isn't. It seems these Orange County settlers have mixed influences just enough to come up with something different. What excites me most about their debut album, *Something Quite Peculiar*, is anticipating how The Dear & Departed will use it to get their sound to the next level. ~~[SCIENCE] KELLY BENSON~~

STORYSIDE B
WE ARE NOT ALONE
Strumming with a heavier hand than their debut release, *Everything and More*, Storyside B attempts to overcome the proverbial sophomore slump by cranking up the intensity. The result is an effort that claims more modern rock territory as its home than the soft rock sensitivities previously displayed. That's not to say that the Florida-based quartet misplaced their sweet, sappy rock stylings. It's just that they don't rely the ballads nearly as much. Whereas Storyside's debut rarely risked anything musically, We Are Not Alone generates a vigor that properly accompanies the emotions, helping to lend some rock cred to a band that needed it. "Fall Down" and "Don't Let It Go" are the primary examples of the edgier Storyside B and the songs largely succeed. Unfortunately the band refuses to completely leave the trite and familiar with the all-too-easy "Tell Me What You Think of God" and the overly produced "Be Still". Although it shows promise, ultimately We Are Not Alone ends up as nothing less or more than a musical mixed bag. ~~[GOTEE] MATT CONNER~~

RUTH
SECONDHAND DREAMING
"I have always been a sucker for melody," explains Dustin Matthew Ruth, vocalist for the latest Tooth & Nail entry that bears his surname. "I wanted to take all the best parts of my inspiration, combine them with honest lyrics, and write songs that hopefully people would enjoy, possibly be moved by." For the most part, Ruth delivers on these hopes with accessible melodies and memorable hooks akin to radio-driven acts like Third Eye Blind. Some tracks veer ever so slightly, either bearing slight Americana leanings ("Here to New York") or including piano-laden Euro-builds ("Mr. Turner"). However, having Aaron Sprinkle (MxPx) at the production helm brings cohesion to a project that might otherwise sound scattered. The result here is hardly groundbreaking, but Ruth crafts a foundation on *Secondhand Dreaming* of pleasant radio-friendly rock riffs that reveal future possibilities of a natural sonic expansion. ~~[TOOTH & NAIL] MATT CONNER~~

DIZMAS
TENSION
When vocalist Zach Zegan warns, "hold on tight because jealousy hurts" during "Jealousy Hurts," he is stating the obvious. But with *Tension*, Dizmas' second release, this five-piece wastes no time getting cute and poetic. As its title suggests, this disc is filled with edgy music focused on the stresses of everyday life. If life was a cute poem, perhaps this CD might come off more flowery. But it ain't, which is why Dizmas sound pained with a purpose throughout. On the group's prior outing, *On A Search In America*, Zach Zegan sometimes sang a little too Axl Rose-like for comfort. But he's toned down his Rose-iness considerably. "If You Love Someone," for instance, is a sweet ballad – even though its lyric borrows a tad too much from Sting's "If You Love Someone Set Them Free." Overall, Dizmas have found the right balance between crunching hard rock and memorable melodies, to provide tension without pretension. ~~[CREDENTIAL] DAN MACINTOSH~~

JON MCLAUGHLIN
INDIANA
With a stunning hometown tribute, singer/songwriter Jon McLaughlin has both the looks and the musical chops to be the proverbial next big thing. Signed to his major label debut as a senior at Anderson University, McLaughlin co-wrote all of the tracks on *Indiana,* which lends a sentimentality and authenticity to the thirteen piano-driven tracks. Lead single "Beautiful Disaster" showcases the mature, raspy vocalist at his simplest and best, allowing a simple string arrangement and piano melody to carry him to the memorable hook. Other songs like "Human" and "Already In" serve to further develop McLaughlin's sound as a Billy Joel for a new generation. *Indiana* constructs a solid foundation for McLaughin to build upon and should be one of the stronger debuts of 2007. ~~[ISLAND] MATT CONNER~~

KISS THE GUNNER
WHY ARE WE SO DEAD?
Metal-infused hardcore to a "T," fans of Maylene, Pantera, Spoken(!) and The Chariot have 9 solid reasons to bang their head here. ~~[HARVEST EARTH] DOUG VAN PELT~~

BEFORE THEIR EYES

S/T

The fresh faced Findlay, Ohio act Before Their Eyes stole the elements of dirty rock and metalcore, broke them into pieces and tried to glue them back together onto a screamo canvas. Somehow, the montage along with some randomly scattered toppings works for their self-titled debut, but the piece leans close to following apart. However, they manage to keep it together by letting the melodic vocals and guitars frequently dominate over the roars and breakdowns. And by staying true to keep the listener guessing, they sometimes select to superbly separate their tracks with interludes of electronics, piano, strings, and acoustics which act as crushing crescendos. ~~[RISE] DAN FRAZIER~~

FROM BEGINNING TO END

IN THE BEGINNING

It's never easy to critique art by a group of guys who, in their lyrics and bio, are so clearly dedicated to God … but here it is. FBTE presents a debut full of 90's influenced garage rock. It's clear they aspire to be more of a melodic metal band, but most attempts don't quite hit the mark. Breakdowns and screams seem forced, riffs sound dated, and the vocals are a bit bland. Still, as the album title states, this is only the beginning, and there are a few interesting parts. Their hearts are in the right place, and with time and better production, they may find the tunes to match. ~~[WOUNDED] TIM HALLILA~~

TYLER READ

ONLY ROCK AND ROLL CAN SAVE US NOW

If your air guitar skills are sorely out of practice, I strongly suggest you add Tyler Read to your workout mix immediately. In their brash and catchy debut, this band mixes the melodic energy of current bands like Fall Out Boy or Coheed and Cambria with a huge, heaping helping of old school rock 'n' roll attitude. If you are anything like me, you might be singing along with a squinty-eyed glare and your tongue peeking out through clenched teeth. A fun first outing for these guys, with some nice chops to boot. ~~[IMMORTAL] TIM HALLILA~~

RUSH OF FOOLS

S/T

Birmingham, Alabama quintet Rush Of Fools creates clean catchy rock slathered with protruding pop. Every track on their self-titled debut is unapologetically sealed with a delicate intro and soaring chorus that arrests the mind and lifts the heart. The only problem is that it all seems almost too perfect, as if they're not human and must have spontaneously spawned from the pure goodness of sunshine, surprise birthday parties, and long hugs. Go ahead and take them home to meet Mom. ~~[MIDAS] DAN FRAZIER~~

SOUL-JUNK

1959

Soul-Junk morph their propensity for outre' hip-hop in recent years into something different yet harkening back to their earliest noise rock days. On *1959* Glen Galaxy and his cohorts go back to singing nothing but Scripture. Looking like the first part of a series that could take a while to finish, they go through the first 23 Psalms. What remains of their recent past is the use of loops. In more cases than not, the repetition of riffs and motifs throughout Galaxy's delighted melodic meandering through these biblical song-poems work, and S-J's musical inventions generally add fresh, so-askew-it's-skewed sonic context to the biblical song-poems. Here's, however, wishing that musicians creative as S-J can go beyond loops into even more improvisatory imagination with the next batch of Psalmody they tackle. And how much y'wanna bet #119 is an EP unto itself? ~~[QUIVER SOCIETY] JAMIE LEE RAKE~~

BEN + VESPER

ALL THIS COULD KILL YOU

Do you have those certain friends who are overly creative? The husband/wife team Ben + Vesper Stamper are members of that club. They are artists, musicians, clothing makers and parents. *All This Could Kill You* is their debut full length following last year's *More Questions* EP. Ben's baritone hum marries Vesper's hushed vox to create wonderfully melancholy harmonies that talk about day to day life experiences. Reminding me at times of Ida, Smog or The Handsome Family; some may consider this freak-folk. Appearances by Sufjan and members of Danielson only add to the goodness. ~~[SOUNDS FAMILYRE] DOUG GIESBRECHT~~

NEUTRAL AGREEMENT /THEY MET IN L.A.

[SPLIT]

This album is not that great, but it had the potential to be good. Despite their attempts, both Neutral Agreement and They Met In LA just didn't make the mark. The music was good, but the production was, well, non-existent. The vocals were barely hearable over the other noise. On a positive note, Neutral Agreement's portion of the EP is called *Math* and their songs did have an interesting naming scheme, such as "Divide the Sum of Treason" and "Square Root of Charles Barkley." I found this very imaginative and innovative. Keep an eye out for these two bands as their careers proceed. They have the potential to be good, just didn't make the grade this time around. ~~[FUTURE DESTINATION] TIMOTHY GERST~~

JOY ELECTRIC

THE OTHERLY OPUS

Confound you, Ronnie Martin! With the seemingly proggy pretension of your songs' titles and artwork looking like the cover for an album of Eastern European microtonal recitations, I was prepared to slag your latest Joy Electric album but good. Alas, you've me at bay. Were The Pet Shop Boys heterosexual saints on a relatively experimental jag and wanting to explore matters of soteriology and the global effects of humanity's fall, this fifth album in your current mega-epic semi-conceptual opus would serve as fine a template for them as any. Mind you, Ronnie, you are still pretty high falutin with your use of "frivolity," "necessities," "ponderance" and other 50-cent words into your ditties, but "soteriology" doesn't come for free either, eh? Besides, your patentedly lachrymose vocals probably couldn't work better with all your massively memorable hooks and arrangements that re-interpret most every mid-'80s U.K. electro-pop nuance. So, once again, it's all love, Ronnie. Yours truly... ~~[TOOTH & NAIL] JAMIE LEE RAKE~~

Ratings

	DV	Writer
Before Their Eyes *S/T*	03*	03*
From Beginning To End *In The Beginning*	02	02
Tyler Read *Only Rock And Roll Can Save Us Now*	03*	03
Rush Of Fools *S/T*	02*	03*
Soul-Junk *1959*	02*	03
Ben + Vesper *All This Could Kill You*	03	02*
Neutral Agree.../They Met... *[Split]*	02*	02
Joy Electric *The Otherly Opus*	03	04

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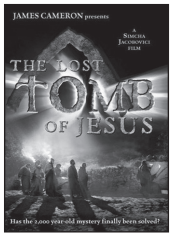
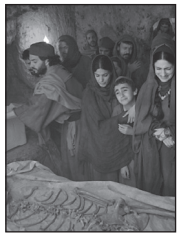
Entertainment reviews
DVDS, BOOKS & GADGETS


JAMES CAMERON presents
A SIMCHA JACOBOVICI FILM
THE LOST TOMB OF JESUS
Has the 2,000 year-old mystery finally been solved?



01 THE LOST TOMB OF JESUS
KOCH VISION

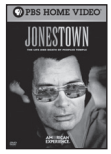
I trust Paul the apostle, who said it best: "If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we are most foolish among men." If the premise of this documentary is correct (that the buried bones of Jesus and His "wife," Mary Magdalene were found by archeologists in Israel 27 years ago), then we as Christians are complete idiots and our faith falls apart. Sure, Jesus taught some great, insightful messages about how to treat our fellow man, but any careful examination of the whole of Scripture (both Old and New Testament) reveal that Jesus' chief purpose on earth was to die for our sins as the Perfect Mediator and spotless High Priest between us and God. While stories and conspiracy theories are often fascinating to look at, make no bones about it (unintended pun, I promise) – this documentary aims dead center at destroying the Christian faith. The film-makers won't claim this motivation, but it is a safe assumption that if one ever found the bones of a dead Jesus Christ, His bodily resurrection claim would be proved false. Scholars classically peer-review and critique new scientific claims, and this movie's claims will surely be found to fall short in the scientific community, whom will likely affirm that this tomb and its ossuaries are that of a middle-class or wealthy 1st Century family from Jerusalem. In watching the DVD, though, it's intriguing to see the process this team takes to come to their conclusions, which in part reaffirms the respect archeologists deserve for their tireless work. There's plenty of interviews in the extras portion, but not a dissenting opinion. *Doug Van Pelt*

02 ERAGON *FOX VIDEO*
This fantastic tale was clean and imaginative, but it's hard to make the leap from simple suspended disbelief to the incredible ... and the cgi movements of Saphira, the flying dragon are only slightly better than Saturday afternoon TV. Still, the story of a young man embracing bravery was fun. Extras galore. *DV*

03 BORAT *FOX VIDEO*
It's true: This guy is offensive. He tries to push about everyone's buttons – from tongue-speaking Pentecostals to women to Midwesterners to his own government. The packaging plays along with the Kazanikstan propaganda theme. While rough and inappropriate, it evokes side-splitting laughter. *DV*

04 SPIDER-MAN 2.1 *SPHE*
You saw the sequel, so what's special about this re-release? Well, it's a new cut, with extended scenes (some of which is cool action) and even some replaced scenes. Whether it's an improvement is debated by fans. The second disc is loaded with featurettes, including a fun trivia track. *DV*

05 NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM *FOX VIDEO*
I love stories with little people and wax figures coming to life. The cache of great actors used for this film makes tiny little caveats so fun to find and repeat – like Mickey Rooney's evolving nicknames for Ben Stiller or the feud between Jedidiah (Owen Wilson) and Octavius (Steve Coogan). Clean laughs. *DV*



06 JONESTOWN *PARAMOUNT*
The scariest thing about this in-depth documentary about this destructive cult was how wonderful the integrated People's Temple sounded at face value. The story soon reveals the deep, dark secrets of their megalomaniacal leader. It's fascinating to hear so many first-hand witness accounts. *DV*

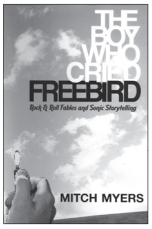
07 HAPPY FEET *WARNER BROS.*
Was the fuss on this one warranted? Probably not. Elijah Wood voices an out-of-step character amongst his peers. A loser-turned-hero story. Lots of classic popular songs are thrown in for feel-goodness, capitalizing on the success of *Shrek*, *Cars* and *Moulin Rouge* and *My Best Friend's Wedding*. *DV*

08 ONE PUNK UNDER GOD *DOCURAMA FILMS*
The fallout of tattooed pastor Jay Bakker's "emergent" position on a key Christian doctrine and his (in)famous parental heritage comprise only some of the drama in this six-episode Sundance Channel reality series. Life changes and risk taking also make up this imminently watchable slice of unique life. Watch out for the cussing on the last episode! *Jamie Lee Rake*

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08
SPIRITUAL RELEVANCY (%)	100	60	80	20	30	100	70	100
OBSCENITIES			47	1		9		4
SCENES OF GORE								
NUDITY / SEXUALITY			12					

Metal: The Definitive Guide
Garry Sharpe-Young – Jawbone

Be advised. If your tastes in musical metalurgy tend toward glamsters with Aqua Net addiction and/or avowedly Christian acts, you're not apt to much up your alley in Sharpe-Young's exhaustively chronicled, historically detailed, witty and reverent text. Should your tastes in one of the first rock music evolutions to nigh wholly jettison blues influences runs to its heavy, thrash, death, black, goth, doom and prog permutations, however, you'll devour these 490+ encyclopedic pages about 170+ acts in chunks gargantuan as their riffs. Chapter headings generally make sense, but get a tad murky toward the end. And what on earth are godly Australian extreme metal practitioners Mortification doing under the heading of American Death Metal And Grindcore without an entry about them at all? Mort' and a handful of other Christian groups arguably deserve some ink here, as well as a few others from throughout the globe that were neglected. Nonetheless, for uber-fans of less frivolous metal and anyone seeking an episodic metal history chocked with details to make record collectors and regular concert attendees salivate, this magnum opus of a book fills that need handsomely ... and heavily. *Jamie Lee Rake*



The Boy Who Cried Free Bird
Mitch Meyers – Harper Collins

For which section of a bookstore did Mitch Myers compile this book of his short subjects – fiction or non-fiction? The prolific rock press scribe and public radio commentator easily journeys into flights of dry-witted speculative fantasy, such as the titular tale of the doofus who cries out for that certain Lynyrd Skynyrd song at every concert he attends (and the band who deliver on the taunt). His straight reportage, autobiographical tidbits and critical writing belay knowledgeable enthusiasm for a wider variety of music than found in a typical issue of *Rolling Stone*. He burrows into the mindspace of the articulate music geek, because he knows it from experience. And if he doesn't quite "get" the one piece of soul gospel he considers, he offers a reasonable assessment from a non-believer's viewpoint. If Meyers is assuming the literary legacy of his late songwriter/children's book author uncle, Shel Silverstein, he does so from a different cock-eyed angle that's often not geared to mature readers. *Jamie Lee Rake*

01

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Gadgets
Logi-Tech, Griffin, & Flashwear

(01) Logi-Tech's **MX Revolution** ($99) is a great wireless, ergonamic mouse with a free spinning scroll feature like the one iPhone has been bragging about. It's rechargeable & quick to set up. Griffin makes it easy, safe, and convenient to operate your iPod in the car with: (02) **Tuneflex** ($49), which uses a sturdy and flexible gooseneck base between the accessory socket and the iPod cradle, & includes an audio output and an extended dock to plug in other tools, like (03) the **Air Click** ($39) iPod remote control, w/ a wireless dock base and 5-key velcro-attaching control pad (to adjust volume, skip tracks, play/pause). (04) Like many of its counterparts, Griffin goes crazy with its iPod cases. The **Kalimara** ($19) is a case in point. To say "it sucks" just shows how 12 soft gel suction cups can grip and stick to anything. (05) The **Photocase** ($19) allows a personal photo/image inside its hard plastic shell. (06) The **T-equalizer** shirt ($12) from Flashwear will make you feel like a woman, because everyone will be starting at you, as the LED lights flash to the music in the room. It's an amazing attention-getter. *DV*

[logitech.com, griffintechnology.com, flashwear.com]

The Christian & Art

WITH KEMPER CRABB

The Disconnect: Why Evangelicals Make Bad Art (Part the Sixth)

We continue in this issue to explore the question of why, in an America wherein one-fourth and one-fifth of the population reportedly profess to be Evangelicals who claim to be directed in "every good work" (Second Timothy 3:16-17), the Church, so far as the "good work" of making art goes, continues to fail overall, producing a paucity of quality art (music, dance, television, film, etc.).

We determined, in past articles, that this failure is due to a result of the lack of knowledge and understanding of the Bible amongst Evangelicals. The twin causes of this lack of Scriptural knowledge we saw to be, first, laziness motivated by self-idolatry in pursuit of pleasure, and, secondly, bad theology, due at least partially to jettisoning the Bible's ethical demands in favor of a feel-good emotional experience.

The upshot of the resulting surface view of Scripture is that Evangelicals have largely lost the ability to see reality (God, themselves, and the world) as it really is. Since the making of art depends upon a Biblically particularized version of the human experience of God's Created Reality, the lack of an accurate understanding of the world results in inferior, distorted artistic expressions rightly viewed by both Christians and non-Christians as irrelevant, inaccurate pictures of the depth and beauty of God and His Creation.

Bad theology inevitably results in bad art. For instance, basic to all views of reality is a concept of origins, a doctrine of creation. Any view of the origin of the universe that differs from the Biblical account of God's Creation of every thing from nothing (Gen. 1, John 1:1-4), a Creation which is upheld and sustained at all times by God (Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:3), and which reveals God at all times (Gen. 1:14; Psalm 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-23), does not provide the necessary resources to accurately portray Reality artistically.

Most Christians have no problem believing and holding to God's Creation of all things from nothing, and so believe that it is not wrong to use created to use created things (such as paint, language, the body, etc.) to render their art, although a poor view of the theological value of the Incarnation of Christ (which will be considered in future articles) has led many Christians to a mistrust of created matter as the medium of their calling.

There is much less realization amongst Evangelicals of the importance of the corollary doctrines, that God continually holds all things together and also reveals Himself through His Creation. We should remember that God pronounced His Creation "very good" (Gen. 1:31), and this Divine assessment of the created world means that God thoroughly approved not only of the making of all things from nothing, but also of His Ongoing Involvement with all these things by continually sustaining them and causing them to reveal knowledge of Himself. The Bible reveals as "very good" not just a clockwork automata or universe which God just wound up and let go, but a universe with which He is involved at every instant, causing things to continue to exist and to mediate the knowledge of His Existence and Attributes (Rom. 1:18-24).

This shows us that not only is the world of matter not evil, but that the physical is the area of spiritual. This is why the Kingdom to God came here, to this world (Mark 1:15), why Jesus became incarnate, not a ghost, but fully human (and thus physical) as well as fully God (Luke 1:26-38), why salvation results ultimately in physical resurrection (I Cor. 15:35-37), with the physical world's deliverance itself tied to that Resurrection (Rom. 8:19-23), and our final destination a New Heaven and Earth (Rev. 21:1-5).

A clear understanding of this doctrinal nexus would undoubtedly lead one to see salvation as beginning with a personal experience with Christ that changes the individual and leads to deep changes in society, politics, the world itself.

Yet, Evangelicals for decades have concentrated in their artistic expressions on only personal aspects and on escape from the very world Christ Jesus came to save. Our songs, movies, paintings, etc., all point to the ultimate destination as being Heaven (as disembodied spirits), when in fact what we think of as Heaven is a waiting-place until the coming of the New Heaven and Earth. We should rather value all the aspects of our lives on Earth, facilitating the advance of Christ's Lordship over every aspect of our lives and existence in this world. A sound understanding of Biblical doctrine concerning Creation would go a long way towards correcting such errors. We will, Lord willing, continue to examine the implications of the doctrine of Creation in the next issue.

[kempercrabb.net]

The way I see it
Chris Wighaman

YOU CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

That's a fact. I know it seems huge. I know it seems like that's a real nice thought, but not something within your actual grasp. I know that if I made that statement out loud there would be a lot of people giving me odd looks.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 says:
"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

God is reconciling the world to himself through Christ. Yet He establishes us as His "Ambassadors". It's funny how God always seems to want to work in and through His people, isn't it? As His new creation/ambassadors our role is to do everything we can to help God reconcile the world to Himself. Figuring out what this looks like isn't too difficult. We have the benefit of knowing how His ambassadors will be evaluated. Check out Matthew 25:31-46. God accepts those who helped reconcile the world through feeding the hungry, giving clean water to those without, helping the poor and homeless, visiting the sick and elderly, and ministering to those in prison. It isn't standing on street corners condemning the sinners. Why is it Christians are more known for their verbal cries of protest against science, condemning sinners, hating homosexuals and money laundering televangelists? Shouldn't Christ's name instead be attached to the things listed in Matthew? Shouldn't His followers be known for changing the world through positive contributions? Shouldn't we stop making statements from afar and go out and get our hands dirty as God's Ambassadors?

Do you want to change the world? Here are ten SIMPLE things you can do TODAY to get started. 1. Think before you act. Everything you do affects others, locally and globally. 2. Encourage. Become more like Barnabas, he was known as the 'Son of Encouragement' and was sent all over the early church because his encouragement was contagious! 3. Help others. Helping others serves as an example to all those around you. 4. Be honest. Trust and integrity are important. 5. Respect others. Everyone deserves your respect. 6. Be Kind. Kindness brings hope to the lives of others. 7. Be patient. Patience shows that you're willing to put someone else's needs ahead of your own. 8. Care about things. Apathy leaves people empty and alone. 9. Be an example. Don't be afraid, God has chosen you as 'Ambassador', step forward and allow Him to use you! 10. Love. I could have just listed this and been done. Loving God and loving others is at the heart of what we are commanded to do.

Devotions
with Greg Tucker

"Whoever is not against us is for us."
–Words of Jesus, recorded in Mark 9:40

As young teenagers when Vietnam ended, my schoolmates and I were awestruck when soldiers returned to our otherwise quiet Midwestern town. We noticed battle-worn men assigned to wheelchairs or with empty sleeves pinned neatly up. One man had a hook where once there had been a hand, and over time we learned that even the healthy soldiers were wounded—it just wasn't visible on the outside. There were lots of casualties from the war.

In the 1980s a different war was looming—the Worship War—and well-meaning soldiers were faithfully divided into two camps. It was Hymns versus Choruses, and a surprising number of people gave life and limb to discredit the "enemy." It sounds odd today, but the issue they fought over was how to worship God. Imagine.

This may come as a shock, but worship is not that segment of music before the pastor preaches. In and of itself, music is never worship. There may be a residency of worship in what's being sung, but whether it's penned by Martin Luther or Demon Hunter, no song worships God simply because it mentions Christ.

Early in the New Testament, before Jesus began his public ministry, John the Baptist traveled declaring that God's promise of a messiah would soon be fulfilled. Many were so impressed with the man's effectiveness, they asked if he was the Son of God. "No," he replied, "I am not." (John 1:19-23)

That simple acknowledgement is a good definition of worship: Worship happens when I realize God is God, and I am not. Countless times each day I come to a fork in the road, a point that requires my response to the question, "Who is in charge here?" What I choose will shape my words, my thoughts, my actions and reactions. It will determine what I write on my calendar and in my checkbook. To declare God's lordship by the choices I make is worship.

Jesus addressed our worship differences, even some of our belief differences, head-on. When the Disciples observed a man worshiping outside of their group, they immediately asked if Jesus wanted them to break it up. The inference was, "Because someone is not like us, they are against us." But Jesus countered their earthly wisdom with his own: "If they're not against us they are with us." Big difference. (Mark 9:38-41)

The directive to appreciate Christians who don't look like we do comes from God. And to obey him in that… well, that's worship. And worship doesn't wound.

[Greg Tucker lives in your computer at HopeCCA.com]

PICK OF THE LITTER

Rick Altizer

Being an older and supposedly wiser music enthusiast brings with the experience a measurement of cynicism, critical ears, and the ability to resist the pull of the "in crowd." Whether it's in or not is debatable, but this three-years-in-the-making collection, *Scripture Memory: Pop Symphonies*, will be hard to resist. On the surface, it looks like something for teenyboppers and young girls to fall in love with (like so much Hawk Nelson), but if you actually listen, you'll be won over by the thick and wondrous harmonies a la The Beach Boys, Queen, The Polyphonic Spree and The Beatles. Yes, they're scriptures put to song, but this creative and musical veteran has really come up with a winning sound here. It's obviously a positive album that's good for our soul, but these lush melodies and well-crafted songs do just fine on their own. Kudos to this old dog for breathing new life into an idea that's as old as Sunday School. (Doug Van Pelt)
rickaltizer.com

For All My Enemies

Pummel me a new skull and shiver me timbers ... this is some hefty, fast and thrashin' death metal. While not a "Christian band," per se, there are some loose connections a la Dashboard/Dylan, etc. The vocals and guitars here are as shrill and attacking as you'll find anywhere. (DV)
forallmyenemies.com

Waiting To Derail

This outfit is fronted by HM Magazine's own former intern, Daniel Markham, who handles all vocals, and plays guitar and lap steel on this alt-country 11-song self-titled album. Who knew he could sing & write so well? (DV)
waitingtoderailmusic.com

A Plea For Purging

Many times (like Sufjan Stevens, P.O.D., Moss Eisley, Pillar), we "pick" an unsigned band and laud them as outstanding. Of course, other people hear the hot talent and sign them. Thus is the fate for A Plea For Purging, as they've since been picked up by Facedown Records since the recording of their last two really good indie releases – 2006's self-titled EP and *Quick Is The Word: Steady Is The Action*. It's possible that these two albums can be had directly from the band prior to their Fall debut retail release. (DV)
myspace.com/apleaforpurging

Manchester Orchestra

We told you once (last year's Jan/Feb issue), and we'll tell you again: This band has something special. Their latest offering, *I'm Like A Virgin Losing A Child*, is both fabulous and weird. (DV)
themanchesterorchestra.com

The Ugly Suit

Aah, here's some beautiful, soaring vocals and great sounds. After releasing *The Midwest* last year, Corban Eldra has morphed into The Ugly Suit. The music they're creating is still slow, melodic and cool. (DV)
myspace.com/theuglysuit

Remembrance

Brutal incredi-double bass drumming compete w/shrill vocals on their killer *Under Angels Wings* EP (The band has since signed to Raging Storm and has a new one, *Beyond the Scope Of Reason*, coming out now). (DV)
myspace.com/remembrancemetal

Jonathan Hape

He's back ... with another creative package and album, *I'm Awake/I'm Asleep*, with lots of lo-fi sweetness, bells, french horns, trumpets and that sort of oddball but tasteful accompaniment to cool story songs. (DV)
myspace.com/jonathanhape

INTOHIMO

Intense screamo with dynamic swings from pleasant to harsh. Predictable, but hard and fast. In a phrase: they bring it. You'll hear that urgency, screaming energy and melodic spark of Thursday, Underoath. (DV)
intohimo.se

Of Asaph

James Alleman wrote the bulk of these songs in Sarajevo, Bosnia "with an acoustic guitar and some time to exhale." The result is cool, anthemic rock with crafty instrumentation not too unlike Anathallo. At times the vocals sound lonely and desperate a la mewithoutYou. (DV)
myspace.com/ofasaphmi

Philmont

If you're looking for some excellent, melodic rock a la Anberlin (who isn't?), then you'll want to hear the six songs on their *Photosynthetic* EP. (DV)
philmontrock.com

The David Ramirez Band

Fun 'n' fresh Rocker Summer-ish pop and alt-Country songs. (DV)
davidramirezband.com

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